



The Ark Pre-School Manager's Report 2019/20

Another year has flown past. We have been privileged to nurture such a lovely group of children and will greatly miss those leaving for school. This academic year is one we will not forget, with so many changes occurring. First we had to say goodbye to the church hall at Crowthorne Baptist church on 19th December and move to our temporary accommodation at Wellington. Secondly, we had to shut the preschool on 20th March due to the outbreak of Covid 19 and remained closed until 1st June.

In autumn term we were pleased to be able to use the church to carry out our Harvest and Christmas assemblies, which were well attended. I am particularly grateful to Avril for giving of her time to prepare and conduct a talk for the children after our Christmas Play. After performing our Play we were delighted to be invited to Wildmoor Heath school to watch their Christmas production. Our Christmas party was organised by The Ark staff and my thanks goes to Clare Bevan, a local author, for coming in to read poems and tell stories to the children.

During the Christmas holidays staff and committee members, along with their families gave of their time to pack up Ark resources and to move them to Wellington. I would personally like to thank all those involved in making everything work like clockwork and ensuring that we had the resources we needed at the hut and other items put into storage. Also, thanks to those who helped to build a shed and shelves for us and set up both indoors and outside.

The routine we follow has had to be adapted to suit our temporary accommodation. The children have been brilliant in trying out new routines and being patient with the staff as we find a way that works best for us. The main change was to make the most of the outside area we have access to. The children love our outdoor play area which has been set up with a range of activities, covering all areas of the EYFS and everyone has fully embraced and enjoying the Woodland surrounding. Children were taught to change after the majority of time outside back into indoor shoes and spending the last part of the morning inside. At first the children needed quite a lot of assistance with this process but they soon became very self-sufficient (with the encouragement of stamps on hands!!!) The rest of the morning indoors includes a storytime, snack time (with counting and language activities), a craft activity and free play. After tidying up we would have our music time and finally Show and Tell groups.

Once again we celebrated World Book day in March. The children and staff were given the opportunity to dress up as a familiar book character and bring in the related book to share with the other children. The children enjoyed creating storyboards and retelling their favourite stories.

Returning on 1st June meant more changes as we followed Covid 19 guidance to keep the children outside as much as possible. We decided to spend the whole session outside, regardless of the weather and we have been very fortunate to have mostly great conditions. We staggered the number of children returning in order to get used to the new rules/guidelines and we're very happy with the way in which everything has run so smoothly. The children have enjoyed playing in the outside classroom and completing a craft as they arrive. They have accepted why they are not able to play with certain things and have enjoyed the huge benefits we have had of being able to use the whole of the college site. The children have brought in their own snacks and we have been stopping at various places on our walk to carry out a range of learning activities. It has been great to observe the children's love of the great outdoors and to give them a little more freedom to take risks and to explore in this very safe environment.

"Fun in the forest" sessions took place in the Autumn term at Chaucer woods and at Wellington up until lockdown. We are very grateful to Liz for coming in voluntarily to help us during these sessions. The children really benefitted from the 1:2 ratio of staff to children.

We have continued to have good contact with St. Brendan's and agreed (by popular request) to visit every half termly. We managed 3 visits this academic year in which we entertained the older people with stories, crafts, songs and plays.

Our caterpillars were a big hit again this year. The children enjoyed watching them grow and change into butterflies. We read various stories about caterpillars and butterflies and sang related songs. We were able to talk about various life cycles. The butterflies had the perfect environment to be freed into as we let them go in the wild flower area next to the theatre.

We were pleased to be able to hold sports day for the Friday children on the athletics field at Wellington. All the children enjoyed a variety of team games and individual competitive games. They all finished by running and jumping into the long jump sandpit.

During lockdown, staff continued to work from home and have contact with the children as far as possible. Staff made videos to send to the children via Tapestry and they read the observations that were posted by parents. Staff were then able to make comments and give suggestions for "Next steps". It is great to know that modern technology can keep us connected, despite not being able to have face to face contact.

We would personally like to thank all the parents for their involvement and continued support. I would particularly like to thank those that brought in a pet to share with the children during our topic of Pets (this also includes child minders). We continue to receive so much positive feedback for which we are very grateful. Word of mouth has always been our top selling point! We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with parents and carers and to involve them as much as possible in their child's learning and development.

Heather Sinclair
Manager
16 July 2020