



## **The Ark Pre-School Manager's Report 2023/24**

Once again, another year has flown past. We have been privileged to nurture such a diverse group of children and will greatly miss those leaving for school and to other settings.

As of this academic year we decided to keep the sessions in the church to Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. We have kept our routine the same and the children quickly learn the transition songs and what is expected of them. The introduction of 2-year-old funding has brought many younger children starting on a rolling basis. This has created a challenge of a prolonged settling in time for many and has meant staggered entry times. We have really appreciated the second half of the summer term as our numbers on roll have stabilised and all the children are settled, reassured by the repeated routine. On the plus side, we are very encouraged by our rise in numbers this academic year, meaning that we have needed an additional member of staff on the days we are in the setting.

Fun in the Forest has continued for two mornings each week, on a Monday and a Thursday. For the existing cohort, these days are not as popular as the setting days, but we are trying to promote the benefits of an outdoor learning environment to parents. We split into two groups, according to age. The children engage in activities appropriate to their stage of development and they take the lead in their learning. These sessions provide great opportunities for the children to talk more openly and freely and to take risks/learn new skills. The older children have enjoyed learning how to use various tools safely, including hammers, drills, files, peelers and knives. They have learnt to problem solve and work as a team. All children have observed the change in seasons and looked closely at nature. There have also been great opportunities to develop physical skills, such as climbing over fences, balancing along logs and jumping off tree stumps.

Our Harvest assembly took place in Crowthorne Baptist church on the Sunday of the church's Harvest festival. This was a great success last year, so we decided to do the same again. We were delighted to be able to take part in the church's Harvest service and do our own little performance to the congregation. It was lovely to see several Ark families attend this service and to integrate with the church.

This academic year, we have visited St,Brendan's once a term to entertain the residents there. The children enjoyed singing to the residents as well as sharing stories, doing a simple craft activity and playing parachute games. It has been lovely observing how the different generations interact and seeing the pleasure that young children bring to the residents.

Christmas is always a busy time at The Ark, but also lots of fun. Our annual nativity went ahead in the church and was enjoyed by all. We are very grateful to the parents for the fantastic costumes they provided. The Christmas party went remarkably well and we were thankful to have such a great Father Christmas!

At the start of the spring term and towards the end of the summer term, we held our key worker consultations. Parents were invited into the setting to talk to their child's key worker about their

progress and discuss their 'Next Steps'. We have also held two 'Stay and Play' sessions, where parents/carers can sign up to stay and play with their child for the whole or part of a morning.

In the spring term, we celebrated World Book Day. This year we gave the children the option of choosing any day in that week to mark this occasion to enable all children to join in the celebration of reading. The children enjoyed dressing up as a book character and sharing their related stories during story time. We were also pleased to visit the library during that week and to be entertained with stories and craft.

We were pleased to be able to visit the Fire Station in March. The retained firefighters did a great job of entertaining and educating the children. There were plenty of opportunities for them to learn from first hand experience, including sitting in the fire engine, trying on uniform, and having a turn with the hose.

In June, we had our summer trip to Sandhurst Park, followed by our sports day at the Morgan Rec. These are always enjoyable events and provide an opportunity for families to come together. Still to come are the carnival parade and Leavers assembly. We are very thankful to Roula for all her hard work and the enthusiasm she has put into managing our carnival entry. Let's hope the rain holds off!

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. This gave the opportunity to talk about various life cycles.

Casper the cat and Rusty the dog have continued to be very loved and the children are all very keen to take them home. At circle time, the children enjoy telling everyone what they have been up to with the pet they looked after. I am sure the parents are as excited as the children when they come out holding a pet carrier!!!!

We are very grateful to Kevin (the church minister) for being an active part of the Ark and also for the church members who have regularly helped us walk the children back to The Ark from Wellington College. We are very encouraged that the church want to build relationships with The Ark and hold several events which all Ark families are invited to. I also wish to extend my thanks to Avril (founder of The Ark) for co-ordinating the walking rota at Wellington and for coming in regularly to help the children make their pencil cases.

We would personally like to thank all the parents for their involvement and continued support, especially to those who have given up their time to help us walk children to and from various places. A special thank you also goes to Liz and Sze, volunteers who come in once a week to play with the children and help staff. Also to Sue, who has come in to sew pencil cases. A big shout out to Bill, the caretaker, who ensures that the building is opened and kept clean and tidy for us to use.

We continue to receive so much positive feedback, for which we are very grateful. Word of mouth recommendations have 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  
17/06/2023