

SOC Meeting – 24th October 2024

Attendees – Chris Young (CY) - Chair

Cara Ratukalou (CR) – Nursery Manager

Tamsin Willis-Stovold (T W-S) – Parent representative

Shamin Sadrafshari (SS) – Parent representative

Apologies

Kathryn Perry

1. Introductions

Kathryn Perry sent apologies for this meeting. No new introductions recorded.

2. Matters Arising

a. Catering - new provider, meat free choices

CR advised that Early Years Catering (EYC) has been established as the catering provider. The food is considered high quality (locally sourced where possible with some organic options) and generally has been well received by the children. Menus change on an 8-12 weekly basis. The menus cater for the range of dietary needs and vegetarian options are provided for all on certain days.

Parent reps advised that some children were saying that there are meals that they really don't like. CR advised that it had been noted that a couple of the meal choices were less popular than others and it was also noted that some meals had a lot of potato and rice. CR advised that the provider only provide 1 option per day and that whilst they will work with the provider to look at ensuring meals provided will be eaten by most children, there is likely to be some occasions where individual children will not like what is provided. Parents see menus and if they identify days where this is likely to be an issue for their children then they can provide additional food for tea should they wish to do so.

CR to report progress at next SOC.

b. Finance

It was again noted that in the coming year there is little / no availability in terms of spaces so this will mean that the nursery is going to have less flexibility to accommodate requests for changed hours and days. This will continue to be the case well into 2025.

The changes to early years "free hours" funding (additional support for children 9 months and older) have been incorporated into this year's fees, Fee schedules have been issued to Parents and Carers for the coming year. There was a couple of queries from individual P&C's but these have been addressed. As with previous years, the fees for the year have been "smoothed" across the whole year to give a predictable standard fee cost per month.

c. **Nursery policies.**

CR advised that she has shared the sickness absence / exclusion policies with Parents and Carers. CR advised that she has reviewed the other policies. There are 130 policies in total and CR is now working through these to see which ones are absolutely necessary. Key policies relating to OFSTED requirements will be retained but there are some policies which are not relevant and others that can possibly be amalgamated.

CR is currently completing the Safeguarding and Behaviour Policy and will be looking to issue this to parents in the coming week.

CR advised that she is looking at the admissions policy document with a view to prioritising publication of this one. **CR to issue new policy.**

CR advised that she is now looking at the safeguarding and behaviour management policies and will be aiming to release these in the coming months. **CR to update at subsequent meetings.**

d. **Parent and Carer's Feedback**

"Packed lunch". CR advised that she had emailed out guidance to parents on what should or should not be in packed lunches / parent provided snacks.

Forest School – CR advised that Nursery has not been using forest school due to staffing. CR explained that this was due to ongoing issues with vacancies and maintaining staff to children ratios. CR noted that staff have been taking children out on campus wherever possible (i.e., when ratios allow).

e. **Communication**

CR advised that Donna has checked that every parent is on our mailing list and removed anyone that has now left the nursery. As previously agreed, the email list will be used for all official Nursery communications. Teams / Whatsapp groups may continue to be used for other communications (room specific notices, requests and similar).

Information for parents. CR advised that she had spoken to Room leaders about updating white boards outside rooms for parents collecting their children at lunch time and that this had been actioned. SS asked that this be checked as she had some lunchtime pick-ups where the board was not completed.

3. **Nursery Manager's Report (Items not covered elsewhere)**

Staff Changes / Recruitment

Sarah Greenland May retired from her position of Nursery Nurse, but has agreed to return in a casual position 1 day per week.

The Nursery is continuing to experience some issues with filling vacancies. Most pressing, we have 1 FTE vacancies in Pre-School and Nursery rooms. 2 offers have been made in the week before the meeting of which, one has been accepted. RD advised she is still awaiting confirmation on the other position.

CR noted that recruitment has become more difficult since changes in OFSTED requirements came into force in early 2024. The effect of this is that level 2 staff cannot usually be included in ratios and therefore when unqualified staff leave, these generally need to be replaced by qualified staff. This creates two difficulties; there is a lack of qualified people applying and the costs of recruiting are higher. We are continuing to look at the possibility of whether apprenticeships may offer a solution to this issue.

CR advised that an agreement has been put in place with Monarch education – a well-known specialist agency in the area, CR advised that the downside to this is that costs for agency staff are very high and therefore these will be used where necessary agency staff will be employed to ensure continuity of provision.

We were unable to fill the Nursery Room Leader role despite several advertisements and rounds of interviews. Jess Piggott has been seconded into the Nursery room leader (for a year initially. Jess has settled into the role and is performing well.

Christmas Show / Party

CR advised that she is hoping to confirm arrangements in the following week. The Pre school nativity and party will be held on the same day, and she is waiting to hear back from Polden to see if we can book a room for both events. Babies and Nursery room will continue to take part at Nursery – Parents are invited. This is likely to take place week commencing the 9th or 16th December. **CR to confirm dates by the end of October.**

Parents Evening

CR advised that these took place last week (all rooms). CR noted that there was a good turn out and reported that she had received nice positive comments. Parent reps agreed and fed back that the feeling was that the quality of information provided to them around their children's development and progress had improved.

CR noted that parents and carers that couldn't attend the "official" evenings have been accommodated.

4. Parent and Carer Reps (issues not covered elsewhere in the meeting)

It was noted that several parents have asked about the possibility of providing a "Nursery App" as is in place at other nurseries in the area. CY explained that this would need approval from DDaT and that currently they were busy with other University wide projects and therefore this is unlikely to be seen as a priority by them at this time. It was also noted that there would be a cost to provide this system, and this would probably need to be reflected in fees. Finally, CY noted that he had discussed this with DDaT in the past and one of the issues raised was around [potential safeguarding issues with wi-fi provision in the Nursery. The University's systems are not locked down in terms of what content can be accessed via the University's systems (to support research in certain areas). To take the Nursery outside of this arrangement would require changes to the University's JISC contract. **CY will check with DDaT to see if this continues to be the case.**

Key Worker Changes – TWS reported that some parents and carers had raised concerns that their child's key worker had changed and they had not been notified. CR advised that some

key workers have had to change due to staff leaving and other staff being assigned to different rooms. **CR to look into the details of this and report back at next meeting.**

Photographs – Reps fed back that some parents had asked about the possibility of having official photographs of the children (individual and rooms). **CR to look at options for an Early Years photographer to visit site.**

5. AOB

Government Funding – It was noted that parents and carers will need to make new applications of government funding ahead of the New Year. **Nursery to email P&C's to remind them of deadlines (CR).**

Parent reps noted that some parents and carers had reported issues registering. CR advised that those in this position contact her and/or Donna to discuss any difficulties.

6. Next meeting:

31st January 2025 – 09:30 to 11:00, Human Resources Meeting Room.