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7. Planning your nursery environment

Your philosophy and approach to children's care and learning will inform the way that you plan the nursery environment and resources. Provision needs to be appropriate to the age and stage of development of the children in the setting. The Early Years Foundation Stage (England)/Foundation Phase (Wales) Curriculum for Wales, Realising the ambition: Being m and Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland) provide information about children's development appropriate provision and play opportunities.

Each age group of children will have different needs and wants from the environment so when planning these areas this should be taken into consideration. You should also consider how continuous play opportunities and free flow play can be achieved in each area, e.g. are children able to move between the indoor and outside areas easily and have access to coats etc. without adult support where age and stage appropriate?

You should consider other areas which you will need such as an office, kitchen, laundry room and staff room, staff toilets and children's toilets and make sure there is space available for these within the nursery.

Inside the nursery

The interior of the nursery needs to be fully supportive of the care you provide for the children, the learning and development opportunities, and also the smooth day-to-day running of nursery operations. Each age group will require different equipment, resources and room layout to meet their needs. When planning your nursery interior always ensure you get down to the level of the children who will be using this area, e.g. can children reach this type of storage easily or would another type be better used? Can they see the displays from their level? Are they able to adapt the environment to meet their own needs and interests?

Colour scheme

The colour scheme that you choose for the nursery will influence the atmosphere of the setting. Consider how it will feel to the people who will play, work in, or visit the environment – children, staff and parents. For children under the age of two years it is important to choose colours that will create a calm and pleasant atmosphere. This is especially important for areas in which you want children to sleep or relax.

Tip

Remember that sleep areas for babies and toddlers will need to be in a calm position with no disturbance, i.e. away from walkways. You will also need to be able to regulate the light in this area using curtains, child safety blinds or separate lighting to enable children to sleep and relax. Sleep areas should be supervised at all times to ensure the safety of all the children sleeping, so separate areas away from the main room are not always a good idea.

For children over the age of two years it is still important to choose colours that will create a calm and pleasant atmosphere, especially in areas in which you want children to relax, e.g. the sensory or book area. Think about colours that will make the most of the space you have and remember children and staff will benefit from rooms that feel open and airy. Colour schemes can impact heavily on behaviour in children, so think carefully about using calming colours, e.g. a red room for children aged two may well provoke challenging behaviour, whereas a calm pastel colour may help with this.

The interior design

The nursery should be warm, welcoming and safe. The design of your nursery's interior environment should make best use of the space available. Consideration needs to be given to floor coverings, especially for babies and toddlers. Soft carpets will assist with babies and toddlers crawling and early attempts at walking, but remember areas in which you want children to eat and play with creative equipment such as paint, water and sand are better suited to laminate or non-slip surfaces.

Also think at this point about procedures for ensuring the health of the children crawling or sitting on the floor/carpet – consider a 'No outdoor shoes' requirement for these areas to keep these clean and safe for the babies and toddlers. However, advise using non-slip indoor shoes rather than slippers to avoid slips.

Toddlers need space and facilities in which they can flow freely and easily from one activity or area to another. An open plan layout will support this, or if this is not possible, think about using rooms that are close together or linked by a doorway so children can move between the areas independently.

Top tip

Children's displays should be seen by children as well as adults. Children will benefit from an area in which they can display their own work independently, e.g. a display board at their level with the tools they need to display their work (e.g. blu tack, sticky tape or Velcro.)

Displays are a vital element of a nursery environment, whether this is children's creations on a display board or materials in the baby sleep area. Remember that displays are not just a means for covering a blank wall; they are an extension of learning. They should include photographs of the journey to the creation seen on the display, as this informs parents of the process involved and reminds children of the fun they had creating their masterpiece. Sometimes displays may only include photographs showing an activity if there was no physically produced outcome, e.g. where the children have used sticks or other tools to make marks in the wet sand or soil in the garden.