

Providing Certainty for Children, Staff and School Leaders

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Ashington Learning Partnership (ALP) serves some of the most deprived wards nationally with Central Primary School in the bottom 2%. Our EYFS model reflects our context. To some, it might be viewed as highly structured and deliberate, but it's undeniable that it works. Our recent Ofsted inspections note:

“Children in early years develop routines and patterns of behaviour quickly. This helps them to socialise and communicate effectively. The calmness throughout the school helps the most vulnerable pupils to regulate their behaviour and to feel safe and cared for. Routines support learning and help develop confidence. Adults model positive and polite interactions. Pupils respond without hesitation and with enthusiasm.” [\(Ofsted, 2023\)](#)

The model is built as a series of layers underpinned by high quality (defined) pupil-adult interactions. Each layer builds a foundation for the next. The principle is simple - 'Ensuring certainty' – the enactment is more complex. At its core, our model is underpinned by attachment theory [\(Bretherton, I. 1992\)](#).

- If children are certain about what to expect (relationships, environment, routines and expectations) they have a safe place from which to explore, play and be curious.
- Planned, deliberate learning and retrieval ensures that we are certain that learning is landing with those who need it most.
- Deliberate pedagogical practice ensures that we are certain that staff are delivering learning with fidelity.

We have codified our teaching and learning as a set of principles underpinned by mechanisms for delivery. Environment design has been important, reducing stimuli and making deliberate choices about what to include, and what to take out.

Routines are outlined for specific areas of provision and developed progressively across the early years. We include tangible actions you can see children do. If pupils know what to do, where to go, what to bring, how to respond and what happens in various situations, then it allows the focus to be on learning because the rest happens automatically. This manages pupils' cognitive load and provides safety for learners who know what to expect. [\(Fletcher-Wood, 2018\)](#).

Routines take time to embed and some children will need greater support to do this. For example, children are firstly taught to check if there is space to play - each area has a visual to let children know how many can play there. This is something that begins in two year olds. Practitioners support children with this by counting aloud how many children are present, pointing to the visual representation of the number. As children progress, it

becomes habitual for them to scan the area, count and then access the space. You will then see Reception children negotiating turns with their peers.

Next, we layer our Expectations. We link these to our milestones -what we expect children to be able to know, do and say at various points across EYFS. These set out typical play scenarios that children might engage in, the role of the adult in facilitating, narrating, modelling and extending the play and quality checks to support practitioners in ensuring the environment is conducive for high-level play.

We want our children to love learning through 'exploring, play and curiosity.' This represents what children are doing during continuous provision. This layer includes the environment design, and outlines what adults are doing, delivering or supporting within the environment. When children are curious, the brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that makes them feel good ([The Curiosity Approach, 2024](#)). This positive reinforcement encourages children to continue seeking out new information and experiences. Some of our learners have limited 'resources' and background knowledge, which sometimes inhibits them making sense of their curiosity and translating their new knowledge into secure learning.



We then have 'Deliberate Learning.' This maps essential knowledge, vocabulary, skills and experiences, progressively across EYFS and ensures our children leave the Foundation Stage ready to access the KS1 curriculum.

Implementation is only as strong as the team delivering and consistency is the hardest thing to achieve. We use deliberate practice during CPD sessions to ensure staff have the opportunity to practice and refine their skills before translating it into classroom practice ([Goodrich, 2021](#)).

To ensure certainty, we need clarity and to be persistent, consistent and insistent. This clarity allows us to build insight with leaders understanding the purpose and a toolkit to monitor what they see and, importantly, what impact it is having on learning.

By doing all of this, we leave nothing to chance and ensure that our children get off to the very best start.

Related EEF Research and Recommendations:

- **"Preparing for Literacy" (2018):** Highlights the importance of high-quality interactions between adults and children.
- **"Improving Social and Emotional Learning" (2019):** Although focused on older children, this report reinforces the role of consistent routines and high expectations in developing positive behaviour and social-emotional skills.

