The Berrymede Junior School Curriculum

A Curriculum designed to be fit-for-purpose – Principles of Harmony – Learning Through Nature

At Berrymede we fully realise the importance of ensuring high standards and expectations in outcomes for all our pupils through a rich curriculum and within a safe, caring environment. We have dedicated time to research the characteristics and qualities of a curriculum that is truly fit for purpose, where children can connect their learning to the wider world and have a more holistic view of how the world works and their roles in it. We want to enable our pupils to understand connections, relationships, actions and consequences, particularly if we want a healthier, more sustainable future, so that children can focus on issues that connect students around the world. If children learn in this way in childhood, it should have an impact on their thinking and actions as adults.

We have embarked upon a journey to use nature’s principles of harmony and enquiry-based learning to bring together skills and knowledge from the different subjects, apply them through projects being explored in order to develop children’s ability to ask questions, to research and generate useful knowledge and to seek resolutions to the questions raised. This approach, coupled with knowledge of the world of nature, where everything is connected (ref: HRH Prince of Wales book, Harmony, A New Way of Looking at The World) tells us how the great traditions, cultures and religions have always understood this need to live in harmony and that principles of Nature teach us how to recreate it.

From our observations at school so far, learning through enquiries is powerful and empowering, pupils have been motivated, creative and the learning has been internalised. Autumn half term 2018 saw the very first series of lessons delivered through a week of enquiry based learning where each year group focussed on an aspect of, The Principle of The Cycle. (The theme of, 'The Principle of Geometry and Beauty – Nature has a Geometry,' will run alongside the enquiry based learning model so that children develop a knowledge and appreciation of the world around them through mathematics in nature and architecture for example):

Year 3 – Life Cycle of Butterflies
Year 4 – the Solar System
Year 5 – Life Cycle of a Plant
Year 6 – The Cycle of Blood Around Our Body

The following information is based on The Principles of Harmony (Richard Dunne, Head Teacher Ashley CoE Primary School, adapted from HRH Prince of Wales, Harmony, A New Way of Looking at the World)
Principles of Harmony – Learning through Nature

There are seven principles of harmony that we will reference in our work and they are:

**The Principle of the Cycle – Nature works in cycles**

The principle of the cycle teaches us that nature works in self-sustaining, self-limiting cycles. When we learn about nature’s cyclical systems, we learn that they are never-ending and create no waste or pollution. This is a model for us to replicate if we are to reduce and ultimately eradicate our wasteful ways. So, we teach about cycles because the more our children understand the cyclical nature of life and learn about nature’s cycles in their different forms, the more they are likely to think about how to align their own practices to the idea of the cycle. This approach to learning also helps them to see that to live well we don’t need to consume and throw away more and more. Rather, we need to create cyclical systems that work.

**The Principle of Interdependence – Everything is connected**

The principle of interdependence helps us to understand that everything is connected. We see these inter-relationships at work through ecosystems where every element of the system has a value and a role to play, and also in our own communities when they work well. So, when we plan out learning, the starting point is to see how we can link learning together to give it greater meaning, rather than teaching through separate subjects with little or no connection from one subject to another. We can still teach subject specific skills and knowledge, but the application is to something much more joined up. The principle of interdependence also reminds us of the importance of good relationships if we are to work well together and the values culture we need to create to enable a collaborative approach to learning to be successful.

**The Principle of Diversity – Diversity is a strength**

The principle of diversity is about celebrating difference and realising that diversity occurs throughout nature and it is a strength. Therefore, we consciously promote diversity in what we do; diversity in one another, in our cultural heritage, in our learning outcomes, in the food that we grow in our green spaces, in the in the uniqueness of all forms of life. If we want our young people to grow up able to appreciate difference, we need them to understand that diversity is the essence of life and it is something to cherish. We nurture diversity in their leadership, pupils lead different aspects of our school such as The Eco Council who manage our energy usage and develop their own projects of change, e.g. our use of plastic water bottles project which involved the whole school where pupils were very solution focussed.
**The Principle of Adaptation — Adaptation is essential for us to survive and thrive**

The principle of adaptation teaches us that just as nature has been brilliantly adapted to its place through millions of years of refinement, so it makes sense to adapt our learning or at least key elements of our learning to our place. Through this idea of adaptation, we can find ways to connect learning more fully to the idea of local and the communities in which we live, to learn more about their history and traditions, what it is that we value about them and what we might want to change. It opens up opportunities for our young people to be designers, to consider how our place might be adapted into the future to make it a better place to live. Importantly, it provides opportunities to connect to those in our communities who have wisdom, knowledge and expertise to share with our young people. When this approach works well, it builds a real sense of belonging.

**The Principle of Health — We all need to be healthy**

Nature teaches us health. We all need to learn what it means to live healthy lives. It therefore makes sense to put health at the heart of all that we do. We can learn about health in our play, in our relationships, in the food that we eat. We can also learn about health in terms of the air, water and soil and what that means in terms of how we run our school. So, for example, in thinking about healthy soil we have made a commitment to working with local organisations (e.g. Cultivate London, Tress for Cities, Princes Trust Trees) to ensure we recycle as much as possible (currently water, food, clothes, paper), paying attention to our environment and becoming increasingly more organic. If we believe health is fundamental to a good life, we need to find ways to teach health and practise health as much as possible.

**The Principle of Oneness — We are Nature**

The principle of oneness reminds us that in all that we do, we also need to learn how to be, to find a sense of peace deep within us that enables us to live with well-being at the centre of our lives. In nurturing an ability to be still and present, to connect to something deeper, we are building a sense of oneness with the world. In school, we do this through Tai Chi, use of art/geometry/teachers reading to pupils daily. We are developing techniques in Tai Chi for the whole school, staff and pupils, so far it is having a really positive impact on our children. When there are so many reports of stress and poor mental health in our young people, it is essential that we help them to learn how to cope with the challenges of modern life through times of quiet, peacefulness and presence. We need to nurture them as spiritual beings.
The principle of geometry and beauty is about learning the patterns and geometry of nature that exist in us and around us. This study of the patterns of nature and how they are replicated, for example, in architecture, mathematics and art encourages new perspectives on the world and how we learn about it. Children have begun to develop the skills of geometry, direct by-products have been greater conversation, a very calm atmosphere, student concentration and enjoyment is clearly evident and children are beginning to link this new learning with the beauty of nature and mathematics. Staff too are involved in geometry sessions; an increased sense of well-being is another by-product.

Geometry in Nature

Geometry and the Golden Ratio in Architecture

Mathematics – Fibonacci in Nature

Geometry in Art

Architecture inspired by Nature