

## Positive Language Policy

At Grantham Farm Montessori School we develop, use and reinforce the use of positive language. Such language is designed to manage and lead behaviour and learning by creating a supportive atmosphere and guiding pupils to positive outcomes.

**Use eye contact with children when you are speaking to and working with them.** Always aim to get down to the child's level before you start talking. Eye contact is easier when you are at child height.

**Use eye contact with colleagues, too.** Eye contact is the first point of communication. You are barely communicating with another person without it. Communication is a two way process with a speaker and a listener, eye contact will ensure you have engaged your listener.

We must also be aware of personal body language and the impression that it gives to the children. Crossing arms can make you appear unapproachable and cut you off from spontaneous interactions with the children and colleagues. When initiating communication, move towards the person you're communicating with. Remember to respect the other person, try and make sure you move so that there are no barriers to your communication, for example shouting across a room or speaking 'over' others.

Use your words to guide the children's actions, rather than automatically offering your hand for them to take and then be guided physically. The children in your care are independent beings and it is our responsibility to promote this, such as "We are going to the bathroom together" "We are going to the garden together". *Use the word TOGETHER to emphasis a joint action to help the child with that transition from one place to another.*

If you wish to promote a transition of the children i.e. from the work cycle to stories or outside play, engage all the staff in this period so that all the children are spoken to individually and told what is happening, expectations set, and praised for achieving. *'We are going out to play now. When you have finished your work please put it back on the shelf, and then you can join us. We are putting our coats on first. Thank you for joining us.'* This ensures that the calm atmosphere remains. A raised adult's voice, or a jolt within the cycle escalates volume.

## **Across the stages of development:**

### **Early Montessori / The Children's House (30 months to 3yrs)**

Although the children are now moving, walking and starting to talk, they are still in a very ego-centric stage of development and are not capable of 'sharing' in the conventional meaning of the word. The children are social beings, but all with their own independent energy to act on their surroundings at different times, on different things, in different ways.

The child's internal sense of order can be re-enforced and fostered, where the children are given the responsibility of simple tasks such as tucking in their chairs, wiping the table, helping themselves to an activity and returning it to its place, on the shelves or table. Their main 'task' within this age span is to work out what everything does, how it works, to perfect their movements and start that incredible journey into verbal communications.

In the environment ensure there is a wealth of opportunities to explore and manipulate didactic and creative materials independently, but within a social setting. Provide safe places to climb up and down, throw, read, build and construct, use simple implements. These latter materials can start to be used in defined spaces, such as on mats, where all pieces are kept on their own spaces. It means that three children can be working with the construction materials, but each one can have their own materials on their own mat. The child is therefore socially engaging in the same activity but in their own way, in their own space!

'Bobby these are ..... brick's. These are your bricks. If you would like to play with the bricks we play with them on this mat. That is exactly where we play with the bricks. Thank you for playing with your bricks on your mat'. (These sentences will be required to be repeated many times initially)

*A vital key is to observe, know each child, what they are interested in and provide opportunities for them to use their energies constructively.*

It is at this point where it is really easy to use sentences that put 'ideas' into children's heads. 'Do not draw on the table, don't climb on the chair, don't push your friend, don't kick the bricks down, don't put your feet on the books etc. You cannot undo something in a child's mind until it is already

planted in there. You say the words above and the child will not hear 'don't. They will only hear 'draw on the table' and then we wonder why that happens.

If I say to you - 'Don't think of Elvis Presley'. You are now thinking of Elvis! You have to think about Elvis before you can then NOT think about him.

*Here we have to rephrase, and use words to direct the child towards the appropriate actions. A simple way to remember how to rephrase is 'tell the child what TO do and not what not to do' using phrases such as, 'Safe walking indoors, please', 'When we draw we keep the pencil on the paper', 'When we are at Nursery we keep our bottoms on our chairs', 'We play gently with our friends' (this is how I play gently, you show me how you play gently with your friend) 'We use our hands when we play with the bricks', 'We keep our feet on the floor when we are at school,' 'Use our hands for the books and then we can read the books'.*

A habitually negative way to attempt to guide children's behaviour is to add the 'consequence' of negative actions when we talk to children. 'Don't do that or you will fall', 'If you do that you will hurt yourself'. It is, however, not a positive or effective form of communication. The risk here is that children will become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you give them the negative consequence, 9 times out of 10 it will happen and you have disempowered the child, and put in feelings of doubt and insecurity, putting a question mark over the possibility of risk taking.

*It is possible to use these sentences, leaving the 'consequence' element out altogether. 'If you would like to climb, go slowly, and then you will be safe.' 'To be safe walking along the wall you need to go slowly, or 'hold 'Mummy's hand', whichever you feel more comfortable with.*

### **Set the expectation and use positive quantitative praise**

Sentences such as 'When we walk down the road, we keep our feet on the pavement', 'To be safe when we walk down the road we keep our feet on the pavement' really help. They guide the child as to your expectation, empower them, that they can indeed do this action and you then do as in all cases POSITIVE QUANTITATIVE PRAISE.

‘Thank you for keeping your feet on the pavement.’ ‘That’s exactly how we walk down the road and stay safe’. Simple sentence structures can be used for a multitude of instances, e.g.

carrying scissors: ‘When we carry scissors we hold them like this and then we are safe’, ‘Can you show me how you hold the scissors to be safe?’ ‘That’s exactly how we hold our scissors’ or ‘You’re holding the scissors so beautifully.’

### **The Children’s House & Grantham Farm Classes (3yrs – 6yrs)**

Many of the strategies above will still apply in many instances and it is imperative to keep the same ‘positive approach’ to all scenarios. When a child is over two, has a better command of the spoken word and understands most verbal exchanges, there is a tendency to reduce the positive quantitative praise and our expectations of this now articulate, confident mover are high.

A child craves attention, especially when it has been so freely given in the first few years of life. A child does not discriminate between types of attention – it can be gained in a positive as well as a negative way. As much as possible ignore the negative behaviours, observe and praise for all those behaviours that you wish to see repeated.

Children develop and progress through a very dark wood, with no clearly defined pathway; they stumble upon the ‘socially acceptable’ ways of behaving by being told what NOT to do! We can show the children a much clearer way forward by using simple sentences, outlining expected behaviour and then praising the desired behaviour when it is achieved. The hardest part is trusting that ignoring some of the negative behaviours (when other children are not at risk) is okay.

It is at the 3 – 6 age that many of the expectations we have of the children should be questioned, asking ourselves ‘Do they know the meaning of these words?’ or ‘Do they know what I mean by...’ rather than taking it for granted that our words are understood. It is best to introduce the child to the concept first and then praise when the behaviour is achieved, for example: ‘Bobby, would you like to play with John?’ ‘If I would like to play with John, say ‘John please may I play with you?’ ‘Bobby can you ask John if you can play with him?’ ‘That is exactly how to ask John. What did John say?’ If yes, then say ‘Thank you John. Bobby would you say thank you to John and then you can go and join him on the mat’. If no – ‘Thank you John. Bobby, John would like to play by himself today, so you can ask him another time, just as you have done today.’ *Remember to respect the child who*

*was playing by himself in the first place and empower him that it is okay to say 'No'. If someone asked me if they could help me in my kitchen I would definitely say 'No'.*

Before Bobby interacts with another child, you can now prompt him as he approaches another child *'Bobby, would you like to play with Jack?' 'You know how to ask Jack. How will you ask Jack if you can play with him?' and then ack That's exactly what I say when I would like to play with a friend, well done Jack'.*

The other change at this stage is that when you have worked with the children in such a positive way and have introduced them to the expected ways of behaving and treating the environment and its resources, you can empower with the statement *'I know that you know....'* For example, *'Bobby, I know that you know how to sit beautifully in the circle, or, please show me how you sit beautifully, thank you for sitting so beautifully, that's exactly how we sit beautifully in the circle'*. This string of sentences can be used for all manner of situations where you wish to redirect a child's energies, but wish to empower them and re-affirm your belief in their abilities. The words can remain the same and your intonation can vary depending on the child and the desired outcome.

As some children go from the unconscious mind into the conscious mind (3 years and over), they may require choices, *'Bobby I know that you can sit beautifully in the circle. Would you like to show me how you can sit beautifully in the circle?' (wait, be patient, give the child time to process and respond to your request). 'If you are not going to sit in the circle then we will sit here together and watch what all the children are doing.' 'Are you ready now to join all the other children?' 'I knew that you knew how to sit in the circle beautifully'*. This works on the premise that all children are social beings and would like to be doing what the rest of the group is doing.

*'Bobby I know that you know how to play with the sand beautifully. When we play with the sand we keep it all in the sand pit' or 'Please keep the sand in the sandpit'. 'If you'd like to play with the sand then we keep it in the sand pit'. Giving the child a choice about how to behave is a powerful tool, 'You can play in the sand pit beautifully or come and sit with me? What would you like to do?' Bobby will either start playing appropriately with the sand to which you can praise his behaviour, or he will*

not. If not, then say that after 3 he will need to make his choice. After the countdown ensure that you keep to the choices that you have given a child. Do not give in. If you get to 3 and the child has not done as requested then he is removed politely, and the second choice is carried out, which was not to play in the sand. Bobby would sit with an adult for a short time pointing out all the other children and the positive aspects of their work or play, telling Bobby that you know he can also carry out the desired behaviour.

In all cases of communication know that changing is not easy. It takes time. Ask colleagues for help to point your own phrases out to you. The first step to making changes in the way we speak to children is to firstly become aware of how we communicate and having the desire to make a change.

<b>This policy was adopted on</b>	<b>Signed on behalf of the school</b>	<b>Date for review</b>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>E. Wetherley</i>	<i>September 2022</i>