Observation, Assessment and Record Keeping Policy and Procedure

Policy Statement

Ladybird Childcare Services recognises that high-quality observation, assessment, record keeping and reflective practice are essential components of providing safe, inclusive and developmentally appropriate care and learning.

Observations enable practitioners to understand each child's interests, strengths, development, wellbeing, communication, play and individual needs. They provide information which helps practitioners plan appropriate experiences, adapt the environment, identify opportunities for challenge and extension, and recognise where additional support may be beneficial.

The Northern Ireland Minimum Standards require observations of children's play to be used to identify children's stages of development and to inform planning for their individual needs in full day care. For sessional care, informal observations should be used for the same purpose.

Ladybird Childcare Services will therefore use observation and assessment as an integral part of everyday practice rather than as an exercise in producing unnecessary paperwork. Observations may be recorded in a variety of appropriate formats, including brief written observations, photographs, videos, examples of children's work, parental contributions and digital learning-journal entries through Tapestry.

Our approach will be child-centred, strengths-based, inclusive and proportionate. We will focus on what children can do, what they are interested in, how they learn and what support or experiences may help them progress.

Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- promote children's learning, development, wellbeing and individual progress;
- ensure that practitioners know the children in their care and understand their individual interests, strengths, needs and circumstances;
- provide evidence to inform planning and evaluation of the curriculum and provision;
- ensure that observations are meaningful, purposeful and proportionate;
- identify emerging developmental, communication, social, emotional or additional needs at an early stage;
- provide appropriate challenge, support and extension for every child;
- promote equality, inclusion and participation;

- involve children, where developmentally appropriate, in reflecting on their experiences and learning;
- strengthen communication and partnership with parents/carers;
- provide accurate records which support continuity of care and professional communication;
- ensure records are accurate, confidential, securely stored and appropriately retained; and

Principles of Observation and Assessment

Ladybird Childcare Services will ensure that observation and assessment:

1. **Focus on the whole child**
   Practitioners will consider children's learning, development, health, wellbeing, relationships, communication, interests and individual circumstances.
2. **Are child-centred**
   Children's interests, choices, voices and experiences will influence observations and future planning.
3. **Are inclusive**
   Children will be observed in ways which take account of age, stage of development, disability, additional needs, culture, language, communication and individual circumstances.
4. **Are strengths-based**
   Records will identify children's achievements and emerging skills as well as areas where further support may be appropriate.
5. **Are purposeful**
   Staff will not create observations simply to increase the quantity of records. An observation should contribute to understanding the child, planning provision, evaluating practice, sharing significant learning or identifying support needs.
6. **Are factual and objective**
   Practitioners will record what they saw and heard, distinguishing factual observation from professional interpretation.
7. **Inform practice**
   Observations will be used to influence planning, interactions, resources, experiences and the environment.
8. **Reflect children's development over time**
   Staff will review observations collectively to build an accurate picture of

children's progress rather than relying on a single observation or isolated milestone.

9. **Respect privacy and confidentiality**
   Children's information will only be accessed, recorded or shared appropriately and with those who have a legitimate need to know.

10. **Support partnership with parents/carers**
    Parents/carers will be encouraged to contribute information about children's interests, achievements, development and experiences at home.

The Minimum Standards specifically state that observations of what children do and say should be used to meet individual needs, promote wellbeing and guide the work of practitioners with children.

Areas of Learning and Development

Where appropriate to the age and stage of the child, observations will consider the six areas of learning within Northern Ireland's early years/pre-school context:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development;
- Language Development;
- Early Mathematical Development;
- Physical Development;
- Creative and Aesthetic Development; and
- The World Around Us.

Observations will not be artificially restricted to one area. Children's learning is interconnected and a single experience may provide evidence across several areas.

For children attending school-age provision, observations will focus on their individual interests, wellbeing, social development, independence, relationships, play, communication, skills and experiences as appropriate to their age.

Settling-In and Initial Information

At enrolment and during the settling-in period, staff will gather information from parents/carers about the child, including, where relevant:

- interests and preferred activities;
- strengths and emerging skills;
- communication and language;
- routines;

- friendships and relationships;
- comforters and emotional needs;
- cultural and family background;
- dietary and health information;
- additional needs or disabilities;
- previous experiences of childcare;
- developmental information shared by parents or other professionals; and
- any information which may affect the child's wellbeing, learning or participation.

Parents/carers will be informed that Ladybird Childcare Services uses observation and assessment as part of its normal practice.

Parents/carers will also be informed about the use of digital learning journals, including Tapestry, where applicable, and the setting's arrangements for photographs, videos, information sharing, confidentiality and data protection.

Observations

Staff will observe children as part of everyday interactions and play.

Observations may include:

- spontaneous observations;
- planned observations;
- observations of child-led play;
- observations during adult-supported activities;
- observations of interactions and relationships;
- observations of communication and language;
- observations of physical development and independence;
- observations of problem-solving and thinking;
- observations of creativity and exploration;
- photographs or short video clips where appropriate;
- examples of children's work; and
- information contributed by parents/carers.

Tapestry may be used to record observations, photographs, videos, assessments, reflections and parental contributions. Tapestry supports observations which can include written notes, photographs, videos, audio, documents and assessments and can be used to build an individual learning journey for each child.

7. Recording Observations

When recording an observation, staff should, where appropriate, include:

- location/activity;
- factual description of what the child did or said;
- relevant comments made by the child;
- the child's interests, strengths or achievements;
- relevant links to learning and development;
- possible next steps;

Staff should avoid unnecessary judgements or labels.

This provides an accurate account of what happened and allows staff to consider the child's social development and appropriate next steps.

8. Frequency of Observations

There is no requirement for staff to produce a fixed number of observations for every child every week.

The frequency and type of observation will depend on:

- the child's age and stage of development;
- the child's individual needs;
- significant achievements or changes;
- the child's interests;
- concerns about development or wellbeing;
- planned areas of learning;
- information received from parents/carers;
- information received from other professionals; and
- the need to evaluate the effectiveness of provision.

The setting will ensure that every child is observed sufficiently over time to develop a meaningful understanding of their individual development and needs.

Tapestry

Where Tapestry is used, it will form part of Ladybird Childcare Services' wider observation and record-keeping system.

Staff will:

- use individual staff accounts/passwords and follow the setting's access arrangements;
- only access children's records where they have a legitimate role in the child's care;
- ensure observations are accurate, respectful and appropriate before publishing;
- avoid recording unnecessary personal information;
- use photographs and videos only in accordance with the setting's photography, consent and data protection arrangements;
- ensure children are appropriately represented and treated with dignity in photographs and recordings;
- check that observations are shared only with the intended child/family;
- use Tapestry to support communication with parents/carers;
- respond appropriately to information contributed by parents/carers;
- use observations and assessment information to inform planning and reflective practice; and
- follow the setting's procedures for account security, access, retention and deletion.

Tapestry allows observations to be saved as drafts, submitted for approval where the setting has enabled this function, or shared with families. It can also support group observations and individualised records.

Tapestry will not replace professional judgement. Staff will continue to observe children directly and use their knowledge of the child, discussions with colleagues and parents/carers, and other relevant information when assessing development and planning provision.

Parent/Carer Contributions

Parents/carers are important partners in understanding children's learning and development.

Parents/carers will be encouraged to:

- share achievements and interests from home;
- provide information about changes in the child's circumstances;
- contribute observations through Tapestry where this facility is enabled;
- comment on or discuss observations shared by the setting;
- discuss concerns about their child's development or wellbeing; and
- participate in discussions about appropriate support and next steps.

Tapestry specifically provides functionality for parental observations and family contributions, supporting the sharing of information between home and the setting.

Where information provided by a parent/carer raises a concern about safeguarding, development or wellbeing, staff will follow the relevant setting policy and, where necessary, report the matter to the manager/designated safeguarding lead.

Monitoring Children's Development

Practitioners will monitor children's development over time and will consider whether a child is:

- developing skills expected for their age and stage;
- making progress from their individual starting point;
- demonstrating particular strengths or interests;
- requiring additional challenge;
- requiring adaptations or additional support; or
- showing a pattern which may require further discussion or professional advice.

A single observation or missed milestone will not, in itself, be used to diagnose a developmental delay or additional need.

Where there is a concern, staff will gather appropriate information over time, discuss the concern with the room supervisor/manager and work in partnership with parents/carers.

Additional Needs and Early Identification

Ladybird Childcare Services is committed to early identification and inclusive practice.

Where observations suggest that a child may require additional support, practitioners will:

- discuss observations with the room supervisor/manager;

- review the child's existing records and progress;
- gather further relevant observations where appropriate;
- speak with parents/carers sensitively and professionally;
- consider whether changes to the environment, resources, routines, communication or adult support may assist the child;
- develop appropriate targets and strategies where required;
- monitor the effectiveness of support;
- review progress regularly; and
- seek advice from appropriate professionals or the relevant South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust/other agency where appropriate.

Any individual support plan will be strengths-based and focused on practical support and outcomes for the child. It will not be used to diagnose or label a child.

Where appropriate, the setting may work with parents/carers and relevant professionals to develop an individual plan identifying:

- the child's strengths and interests;
- areas requiring support;
- desired outcomes;
- agreed strategies;
- responsibilities;
- timescales for review; and
- evidence of progress.

Professional Advice and Referrals

Where a developmental concern persists or additional support is required, the manager or designated senior staff member may seek advice from appropriate professionals.

Depending on the child's needs, this may include:

- Health Visitor;
- GP;
- Speech and Language Therapy;
- Occupational Therapy;

- Physiotherapy;
- relevant South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust services;
- Education Authority services;
- Early Years professionals; or
- other appropriate agencies.

Parents/carers will normally be involved in discussions and referrals unless information must be shared without consent because of a safeguarding concern or other lawful basis.

The South Eastern Trust Early Years service is responsible for the registration, support and inspection of day care provision and advises that registered early years provision must comply with the Northern Ireland Minimum Standards.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All children's records will be treated as confidential.

Staff must:

- only access information necessary for their role;
- not discuss children's records in public areas;
- not share information with unauthorised persons;
- store paper records securely;
- keep digital devices secure;
- use individual passwords and not share login details;
- ensure photographs and videos are only taken and used in accordance with the setting's policies;
- follow the setting's Data Protection and Confidentiality Policies;
- ensure information shared with other professionals is appropriate, necessary and lawful; and
- report any suspected loss, unauthorised access or data breach immediately to the manager/appropriate data protection lead.

The Minimum Standards require a policy covering retention, safe storage and destruction of records, including computerised records, and require children's records to be securely stored.

Tapestry Security and Access

Tapestry will be managed as a secure digital record system.

Access will be restricted to authorised staff and the relevant parent/carer accounts.

Staff must:

- keep passwords confidential;
- not allow another person to use their account;
- log out or secure devices when leaving them unattended;
- use setting-approved devices where required;
- not download or transfer children's photographs or videos to personal devices unless expressly authorised under the setting's procedures;
- not use children's photographs or information on personal social media;
- check recipients before sharing information;
- immediately report suspected unauthorised access.

The setting will ensure that its contractual and data-protection arrangements with Tapestry are appropriate for the processing of children's personal information.

Photographs and Video

Photographs and videos may be used to support children's learning records where this is consistent with the setting's Photography and Videography Policy and applicable consent/data protection arrangements.

Photographs and videos should:

- support a legitimate childcare, learning or communication purpose;
- be appropriate and respectful;
- avoid unnecessary images of children;
- be stored securely;
- only be shared through approved channels; and
- not be copied to personal devices or personal social media.

Staff Responsibilities

All childcare staff

All staff are responsible for:

- observing children as part of everyday practice;

- recording relevant observations accurately;
- maintaining confidentiality;
- using observations to inform planning;
- identifying and reporting concerns;
- maintaining appropriate professional boundaries;
- using Tapestry and other recording systems appropriately;
- following data protection and safeguarding procedures; and
- contributing to reviews of children's progress.

Room Supervisor/Team Leader

The Room Supervisor/Team Leader will:

- monitor the quality and range of observations;
- support staff in interpreting observations;
- ensure observations inform planning;
- identify children who may require additional support;
- facilitate discussion of children's development within the team;
- ensure appropriate information is shared with parents/carers; and
- bring significant concerns to the attention of the manager.

Manager/Deputy Manager

The Manager/Deputy Manager will:

- oversee implementation of this policy;
- monitor record keeping;
- ensure staff receive appropriate guidance and training;
- ensure safeguarding and developmental concerns are acted upon;
- oversee Tapestry access and administration;
- ensure records are retained and destroyed appropriately;
- ensure records are available for inspection when required; and
- review this policy in light of changes to legislation, guidance, Trust requirements or practice.