

Learning Model in the Junior School – Years 0-2

“We are facing unprecedented challenges – social, economic and environmental – driven by accelerating globalisation and a faster rate of technological developments. At the same time, those forces are providing us with myriad new opportunities for human advancement. The future is uncertain and we cannot predict it; but we need to be open and ready for it. The children entering education in 2018 will be young adults in 2030. Schools can prepare them for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, to solve problems that have not yet been anticipated. It will be a shared responsibility to seize opportunities and find solutions. To navigate through such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and self regulation; they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others; and they will need to cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity. Their motivation will be more than getting a good job and a high income; they will also need to care about the well-being of their friends and families, their communities and the planet.” OECD Learning Framework 2030

Balmoral School’s Play based learning rationale

Educationalists have known for decades that play is an essential component of learning for all children, not just those in Early Childhood Education. In the last 20 years, an extensive amount of research has been undertaken globally, which supports this belief. It is understood that the development of the Limbic system, the part of the brain that deals with social and emotional skills, is as important as developing cognitive skills.

There are a number of foundational skills that children need before they are ready for ‘formal’ reading, writing and maths. As young children develop, the acquisition of social and emotional skills is paramount and is now thought to be an indicator of success later on in life. How our students view themselves as a learner is critical. During the early years of school, 5yrs to 8 yrs old, it is crucial that we support our students to build their creativity, imagination, resilience and social and emotional skills. Our school curriculum helps our

students to do this through play based learning and an inquiry approach to learning.

Research from many areas of education, psychology, neuroscience, and behavioural science, support the fundamental importance of play in developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children will require for their future.

Often there is an idea that play in the classroom is an either-or approach – either the children are playing or teachers are teaching. This is not the case. An effective play environment is rich with opportunities for children to engage in Literacy and Numeracy, along with the other learning areas of the curriculum.

Play in Years 0-2

From 8:30am until morning tea, children will play. This will be a combination of self-initiated play and guided play with the teacher asking questions, scaffolding and extending the play where appropriate. No instructional teaching groups will take place during this time, instead, the teacher is actively involved in supporting learning within the play.

For the rest of the day, children will continue to play but the teacher will work with groups of children for instructional groups or class sessions. Other timetabled learning activities will also take place across the week, outside of the children's play, but which we would hope to see the children building on when they go back to their play session.

Reading

A number of international studies into reading, have shown that there is no benefit to early reading. By the time children reach the end of Primary School, there is no difference in reading between those children that started reading at 5 years old versus those who started reading at 7 years old. What can happen though, is that children can lose self-confidence as they struggle to try and learn to read when cognitively, they are not necessarily ready.

We want children to experience reading in a range of authentic forms - we do not want to give children the message that they can only learn to read when they are with a teacher. Nor do we want them to mistake reading as being something that is associated with a colour level.

Reading in Years 0-2

Throughout the day, there are multiple opportunities for reading to be shared and skills to be developed through the children's play and the class Inquiry. Daily sharing of books also ensures that there are rich oral language experiences for the children to build on. Teachers will work with small groups of children, daily, for instructional reading sessions and there will be a short phonics session each day. There are many opportunities for practicing reading throughout the day.

Taking books home

These should be for enjoyment. Once a week, the class will visit the school library and children may bring library books home for one week. A new book can only be issued once the previous ones have been returned. There are a range of books in the classroom and children are encouraged to take them home to share with their whānau. If they choose a book which is of interest to them but perhaps too challenging, then please read the book to your children.

Reading at home should include lots of reading to your children – we want children to build a love of reading without the anxiety which can be associated with having to read a book from school. Research from the National Library states that “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

Writing in Years 0-2

We know from research, that effective writing happens when teachers: use authentic contexts for writing; plan instructional writing sessions; and are responsive to the 'in the moment' teaching opportunities.

As with reading, there are many opportunities for practising writing throughout the school day. Writing will have an authentic context, and wherever possible, will link to the play and inquiry that the teacher sees happening in the classroom. Developing strong oral language skills is crucial to writing and play provides a rich and authentic context for developing these skills.

In addition to the child initiated and teacher directed opportunities, there will be phonics sessions and smaller teacher directed writing sessions. Handwriting will be supported as part of the phonics session and within shared writing.

Maths in Years 0-2

Through play based learning, children are immersed in a rich mathematical environment. Teachers observe closely in order to recognise and build on the maths that is occurring naturally through the children's play and inquiry. With a Maths lens, teachers will make suggestions with a clear maths focus in mind. In addition, there will be a whole class maths investigation once a week.

Inquiry in whānau Koru

By observing and listening closely to the children in Play, teachers will see something coming up that could become a whole class inquiry focus - one that is coming up frequently and that lots of children have shown interest in. There will be one class line of inquiry that will be built on as a class through play and through whole class times. It will flow into other learning areas.

Philosophy for Children – P4C

In Year 0-2, the focus of P4C is, initially, on skills building. These skills based sessions will be linked to the inquiry or play wherever appropriate and when it feels purposeful to do so. These skills are then built on across all learning areas.