



StartBright



Curriculum Handbook

Early Learning for Our Community

2021

StartBright Curriculum

This booklet outlines the important values and pedagogy we have at our StartBright Early Learning Centres.

We provide a secure, respectful and educational environment that supports each and every child to reach their full potential.

We value play-based learning and recognise this is the best way for children to develop and learn skills vital for their future learning journey. We use our day to offer opportunities and possibilities to curious minds, to establish trusting relationships and develop independence and a sense of belonging and identity.

StartBright's curriculum is supported by Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and by Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. We also look to other frameworks and approaches across the globe to encapsulate best practice as a whole. The Reggio Emilia Approach holds particular relevance in our daily operation, its values and principles reflect our outlook at StartBright, a child led, emergent curriculum, in-depth projects, collaboration and documentation.

At StartBright our mission is to champion Early Years Education so that all children can reach their full potential and feel their presence is valued in society. We set the foundations for lifelong learning in partnership with parents and the community. We see children as active citizens from birth that have a say in their education and learning. StartBright aims to give the best start to each child's learning journey.

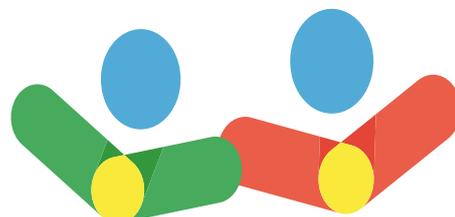
StartBright believes that learning is for life, not just for school readiness.

Key Elements of The StartBright Curriculum

- The voice of the child is respected, valued and frames our whole curriculum.
- A child led, emergent curriculum is delivered which addresses children's well-being, identity and belonging, communication, and exploring and thinking. This is supported by the principles of Aistear and Síolta.
- The role of the educator is one of researcher, collaborator and facilitator. We work alongside children offering support in their learning journey.
- Partnerships with family and communities are valued. Parents are the first educator of the child and communities play an important role in our culture and identity.
- The environments and resources are chosen with children's interests and development in mind. They are the third educator.
- Observing, planning, documenting and assessing learning are important to provide a holistic, child focused curriculum.

StartBright is committed to developing a curriculum that incorporates child development and creates a child led, play based environment, which enables children to actively pursue their own learning. We encapsulate Aistear and Síolta into our everyday routines and look to both national and international quality standards to provide a holistic, inclusive curriculum for each child.

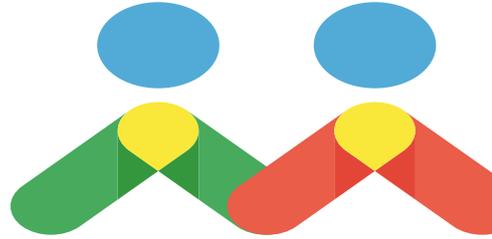
All of these work together to make up our curriculum.



Our Key Principles

Our key principles mirror those of Aistear's

- Well-Being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating Exploring and Thinking
-



Well-Being

Meaning - When we talk about well-being, we look at the whole self, developing as a person, the relationships you hold and form. We want children to feel respected and valued as a person. That their confidence allows them to persevere, persist and gain independence. That they are body aware and are able to assess risk and understand and develop healthy habits.

In practice - To promote a sense of welling in the centre, educators and children share a very equal platform. We believe giving power to the **child's voice** shows them that they are respected and valued in the world. That they are active and participating members of their community and of society as a whole. Enabling them to **make choices** and have freedom over those choices creates space for them to grow in confidence and independence, it allows them to communicate their needs and wants, to follow their own interests and extend on their own learning. Allowing them to connect with their outside world and environment creates opportunities to take calculated, developmentally **appropriate risks**. It gives them a sense of responsibility, to others and their environment, and acts as a space for physical development and improved health.

Identity and Belonging

Meaning - When we discuss identity and belonging, we look to the child themselves, their unique outlook and individual personalities, gifts and strengths. We look at who they are, the relationships they hold, family, friendships, community and culture. What shapes their world and how do they connect to it. Here we also look at diversity, equality and inclusion so the child learns to respect and understand difference, include others and develop morals and ethics.

In practice - To promote a sense of identity and belonging our relationships and interactions with children are paramount. We need to form trusting, long lasting reciprocal **relationships** with each individual child and as a group. With the children we encourage people to be **active participants** in their world, voice their opinions and questions, share their beliefs and traditions and teach us languages and gestures from their home life. We embrace **inclusion and diversity** and aim to engage with and understand the vast world we live in, but also understand that we too create our own culture at StartBright, one filled with compassion, support and choice. It reflects the people within it and their individual personalities and interests; therefore, no two rooms will look the same, no two centres will look the same. We embrace this difference.

Communicating

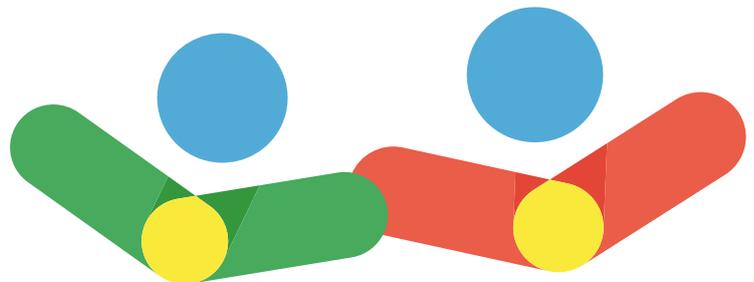
Meaning - When we discuss communication, we look at verbal and non-verbal communication between the children and adults, children and their peers and children in their environment. We also look at how children express themselves using the arts; drawing, dancing, clay, music and technology. Symbols, mark making, as well as literacy and numeracy are open opportunities for the children and their participation is valued and respected. Trial and error play captures in essence what childhood is about, experiencing the world for the first time and figuring out your impact, influence and presence within it.

In practice - To promote communication we champion the **voice of the child**. This voice may not be verbal. Children show their voice in many, many ways and we as educators need a keen eye and a very trusting relationship to unpack the meaning behind this. We hold the child's voice as the driving force behind all we do. We encourage **interactions** of all kinds, questions, discussions, wonderings and expressions. Interactions with family, educators and peers allows for opportunities to problem solve and address alternate ways of thinking. **Communication through the arts** is vital to children. The space to draw, paint and create allows freedom for the child to truly express themselves and communicate. This freedom unleashes a different part of the child, confidence grows, and inhibitions are lost as there is no right or wrong way. We as educators constantly remind ourselves; before they talk, they sing, before they walk, they dance. Art is an integral part of our day and something we actively encourage children to express themselves in.

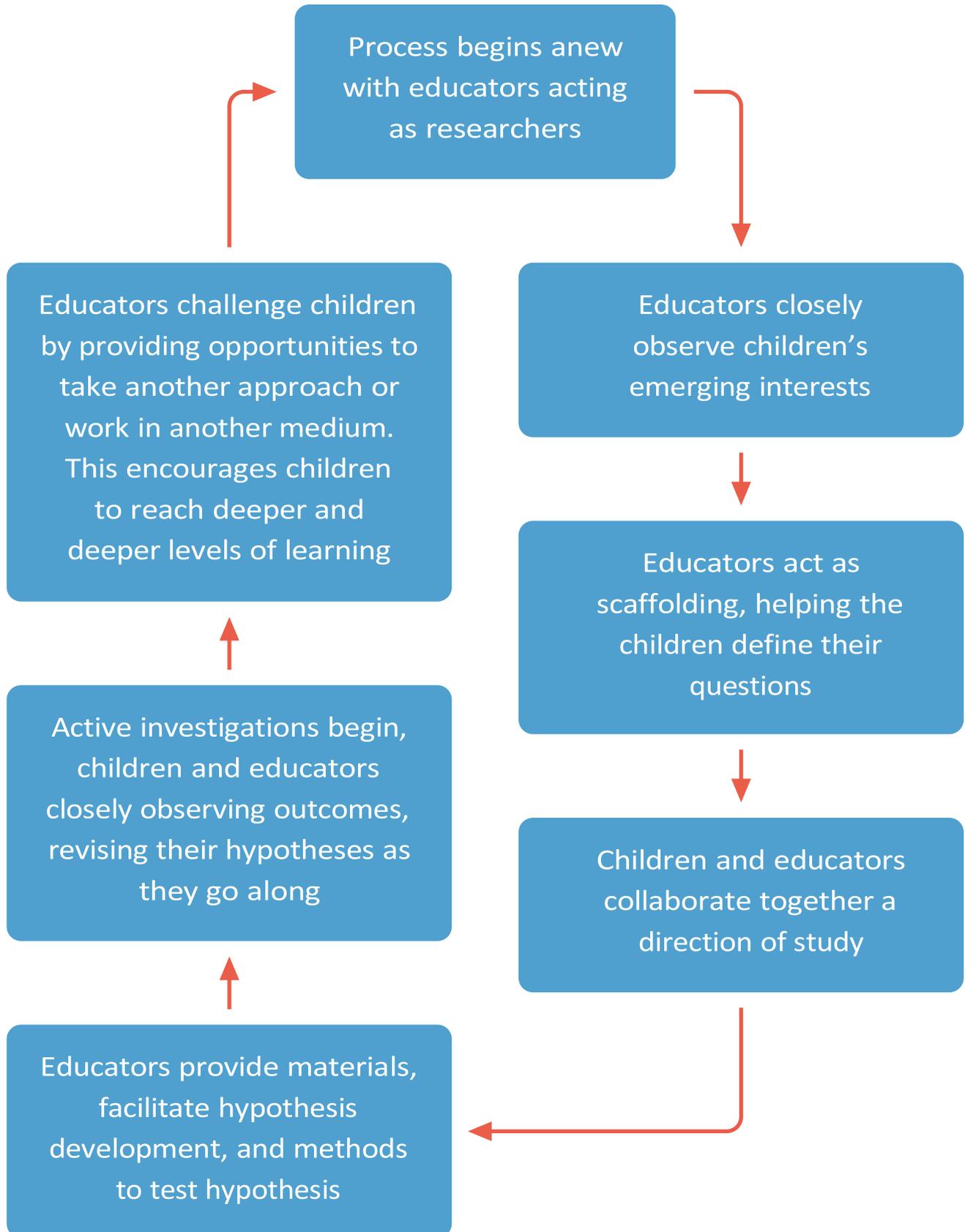
Exploring and Thinking

Meaning - When we discuss exploring and thinking, we look to facilitating an understanding of the world around them. We encourage them to seek answers and meaning, investigate what is happening or can happen, and acknowledge their input in experiences. We encourage children to actively seek meaning and question the world and the norms around them. We support children in their process of trial and error and encourage the persistence and determination that it takes. We help them through the failures so they can find their own solutions to problems. We explore their thinking and wonders and provide opportunities for them to accomplish tasks independently.

In practice - To promote exploring and thinking we look at providing children with the space and the time to solve problems for themselves, investigate and analyse resources and make up their own opinions and theories. We allow children to **make sense of the world** around them by providing experiences with open ended resources, multiple outcomes to the process and freedom for them to work with the materials. Repetition is important here; children like to practice skills again and again. We **promote positive attitudes to learning** by encouraging active questioning, discussing big topics and researching alongside the child to seek meaning and discover answers. The children are encouraged to extend their own learning with support of other children or an educator. We place value on **the process not the product**. We look at the learning in each mark, question and theory rather than the overall product. The process is where all the magical moments happen.



Cycle of Enquiry



Documentation

At StartBright we have two types of documentation, observations and learning stories. In our observations we look to developmental milestones to shape our content, social interaction, physical advancements, cognitive development and emotional development amongst others. These are recorded on our online platform and shared with parents.

Our learning stories are based on the interests and questions that occur within the group. They are recorded in the now with the children and are documented in a large book that is always accessible to parents, children and educators. They too, cover areas of development but with a child interest focus and are completely child initiated and led. Below are examples of what you might see when looking at observations and learning stories.

Observations

27/11/22 12:18

Sam is building with the Lego for nearly an hour. He is having great fun building towers and making lots of different shapes and sizes. When some breaks, he picks it up and rebuilds it. He has been making towers of 10-15 pieces high before realising they fall over. "They won't stand up straight. I've tried and tried." Having observed his approach, I can see where his frustration lies.

'What could you do to make it stronger?'

"Hmmm, I could make it bigger!" He uses his hands to show me he means wider and sets to work again.



Aistear (Ireland)

Show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing their own learning



Aistear (Ireland)

Address challenges and cope with frustrations



Aistear (Ireland)

Discover, explore and refine gross and fine motor skills **Success!!**

Here we see the physical and cognitive development being addressed for Sam. He is problem solving and working with materials trialling different solutions and approaches. Note the educator doesn't offer a solution merely guides him to think differently in his work, allowing him to succeed in his attempts and learning using his own initiative.

This is what our observations look like on our online platform Little Vista, you can clearly see the links to Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

Learning Stories



Here is an example of our Learning Stories. We use these books to document the overarching interest of the children and support our child led curriculum. These are written in at the end of each month to display the experiences the children have engaged in. They provide a synopsis of what the children have been learning and involved in, highlighting their words with photographs. Other approaches such as Floor Books are used in documenting children’s learning where children are directly involved. They house the long-term learning projects, we are unpacking. They incorporate a group of children and in some cases all the children and are documented ‘in the now’. Children have ownership over them, writing and drawing in them, offering their opinions and ideas which are written down to support their theories and wonderings. Learning stories include many different styles of documentation; discussions, photographic evidence, pictures, drawings, photographs, reflections and possible wonderings and questions to name a few. Both styles link to Aistear and Síolta and incorporate values from other frameworks and approaches.

Little Vista

Little Vista is our online platform that we record our observations on, however it is so much more than that. It allows us to communicate with parents about their children’s day in real time. Sleep, meals etc. can all be documented alongside daily notes, experiences they’ve engaged in and the most important, photographs. It allows you to see into their day at StartBright, the learning and the relationships they are forming and the projects they are working on.

The importance of parental feedback is so vital in Early Childhood Education, you after all are the primary educator of your child, so we look to you for guidance and knowledge when working alongside your child. Understanding that days are becoming increasingly busy, we try to offer every avenue for you to be part of your child’s learning journey. We encourage you to leave suggestions and feedback through the app via the Learning Loop. This is always in conjunction with face to face conversations. We encourage parent involvement as much as possible and value all contributions.

What does Little vista do?

- **Observations** - links our observations to Aistear and Síolta, allows them to be shared with you.
- **Learning** - sharing our learning, their experiences and comments. We can add photos, link to Aistear and add in milestones.
- **Share** - daily updates, photos of artwork, special moments and discoveries. **Real Time**
- **updates** - for sleep and mealtimes (if required)

Literacy

At StartBright we believe in an emergent approach to literacy and numeracy.

What is emergent literacy?

“Emergent literacy is a term that is used to explain a child’s knowledge of reading and writing skills before they learn to read and write words. It signals a belief that, in literate society, young children-even those of a nursery age are in the process of becoming literate.”

Emergent literacy starts at birth and develops through children’s interactions with the world around them. Language, listening, writing and reading, these are learnt all at the same time!

At StartBright we encourage a literacy enriched environment. We role model language and interactions, we execute discussions, read books and seek understanding. We research, provide mark making materials with a broad spectrum of mediums, we sing and rhyme, play and listen to music. We articulate speech sounds, play language games and engage with outside speech and language therapists. We integrate literacy into our day, so children learn in the most natural way to them, through play. In doing so we create a love for literacy, a passion for words and an understanding of the importance of literacy in our lives. We try to instil that learning is for life, not just for school readiness.

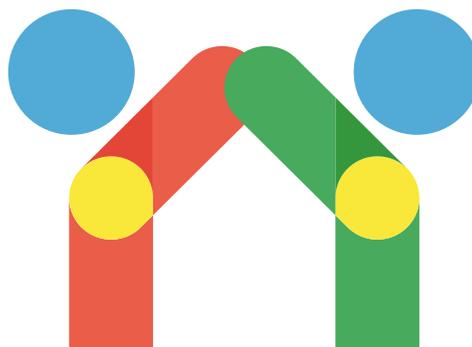
Numeracy

At StartBright we believe that numeracy is a lot more than just counting and numbers. It includes knowledge about space, mass, volume, patterns, measurements, time, chance, data as well as counting and numbers. We provide many different opportunities for the children to explore numerical concepts through everyday objects, experiences and play. The foundations for numeracy and mathematical learning begins in the Early Years and we aim to provide confidence and familiarity towards these concepts in our numeracy enriched environments. We also try and utilise real life resources so enhance these environments and children begin to understand the properties and make up of different objects

What does this look like?

At StartBright numeracy meanders into all our areas of play. The sand and water table work with mass, and volume, weight and space, as too does our natural environments when we think of digging and scooping, planting and transporting. Outdoors we look at physical maths, spatial awareness, height, length, space and time. Inside we often look at pattern and sequence, numbers and counting, date and chance. We believe maths is everywhere and challenge the children to embrace it at every turn.

Through our child led, play based curriculum literacy and numeracy is developed upon at every opportunity. It is an integral part of our day that is seamlessly ingrained into our practice.



Science

We are all natural born scientists, it is part of our human make up. We cook, tie shoelaces and work in the garden.

These all represent how we use science in an everyday capacity. Children are no different. They too naturally want to investigate science and seek meaning with it. Experiences we often consider mundane and routine, challenges and excites children. Why we promote science in the Early Years?

At StartBright we encourage all our children to be critical thinkers. We want to facilitate them to question what happens around them, to seek meaning from their experiences and gain confidence in trialling their own experiments to gain understanding. This enhances their connection to their world but also to others around them. When a child is questioning and wondering it almost always impacts another child. It may be through observation, a child watching the movements of the other, or it may be socially, asking for help, noticing something looks enticing and wanting to join in etc. It creates connections.

At StartBright we believe science makes the ordinary and so it becomes extraordinary. Cooking, painting, planting, water and sand play to name a few lend so many wonderful ways to involve science in our day and mimic behaviours we see occurring at home. Washing dishes is a wonderful experiment for example, the bubbles, cloths, how the cup floats first then sinks. Magic!

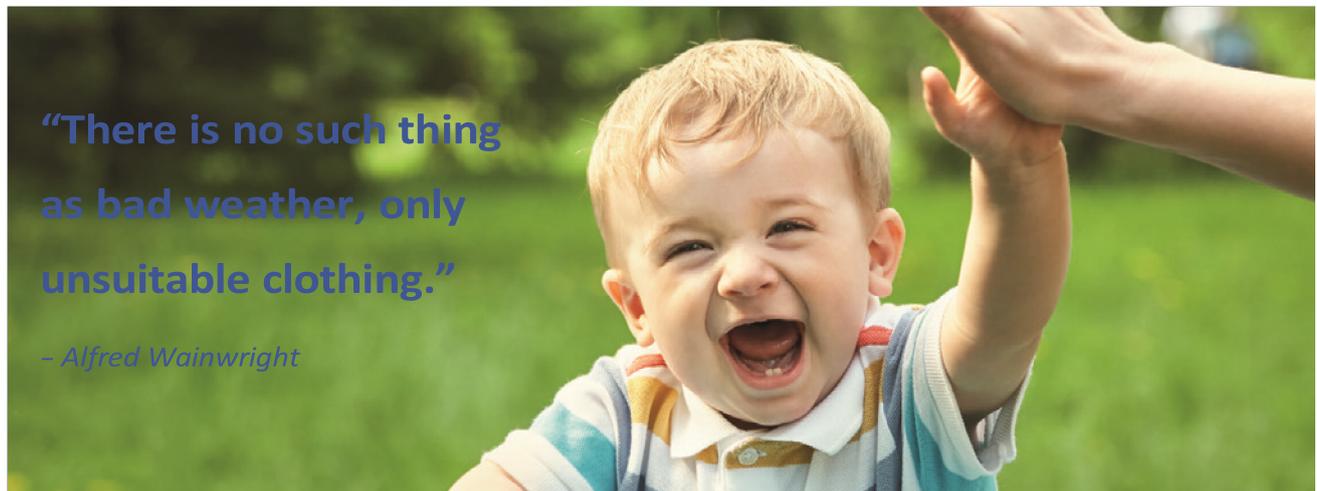
Science is not located in any one corner of the room but naturally integrated into our day. We constantly provoke new understandings to enhance the children's innate curiosity. This helps to construct and foster shared learning, the educator and child working in collaboration to research, hypothesise and philosophise.

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is a priority of our StartBright centres as it is paramount to physical development and health, especially mental health. We value the outdoor environment just as much as our indoor environment and so actively engage in outdoor play every day, regardless of the weather. We aim to provide the children with as much learning and provocation as we do in our inside environment but with the added elements of bigger movements, connecting to nature, louder and larger voices and risk assessment. These skills help children to become increasingly more independent, encourages

perseverance and enables them to be resilient people. The outdoors helps us to problem solve, engage in social interactions and be one with our world through hands on involved learning.

StartBright is always researching and looking into best practice and a common theme keeps emerging, children are becoming increasingly stressed and physically disadvantaged. This is primarily down to lack of physical play in the outdoors and being connected to nature and its presence. We at StartBright champion our outside world so children become excited and eager to be active explorers and inquisitive investigators whilst building their muscles, strengthening their core and releasing their stresses in a safe and inviting setting.



**“There is no such thing
as bad weather, only
unsuitable clothing.”**

- Alfred Wainwright

Lifelong Learning

At StartBright we believe that Early Education paves the way for lifelong learning. A supportive, child lead curriculum underpins each child's learning journey and prepares them with skills for the 21st century. The Essential 21st Century Skills for Life have been developed to prepare children and students for life, work and citizenship in the future. Studies suggest that two thirds of all children will be working in jobs that do not exist yet, therefore we need children to be flexible and dynamic thinkers to enable them to succeed in the changing and evolving world, that will be in place later in their life.



The Early Years is the best place for this learning to start. 85% of all brain development happens within the first 3 years of life. Before a child turns 5 years old, we have this window of opportunity to help intentionally educate children of these life skills. By providing children with a child centred, interest based, emergent curriculum which is supported by reciprocal trusting relationships and partnerships, we develop a learning environment that is authentic, meaningful, engaged and inspired.

At StartBright we welcome this challenge and aim to be advocates of lifelong learning, as we know that a love for learning and a passion for knowledge gives children a successful start to life. The 21st Century Learning for Early Childhood Guide gives us great insight into the strategies to help our educators teach these life skills but also how to create the environment to reflect the learning.

These skills are broken up into three groups, the 'Me Skills', the 'We Skills' and the 'Why Skills'. While all these skills are important and will play a vital role in children's futures, the 'We Skills' are something which reflects StartBright's ethos and values. They are better known as the Four C's which represent, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration and Critical Thinking.

But what does this look like at StartBright?

Creatively children express themselves in a range of mediums, their strengths and interests are celebrated alongside them and their voice is championed. Children have freedom to create and experiment to make meaning and seek understanding. Creativity is only limited by imagination; thus, our resources are bought in multiples of 100s so the child can create without boundaries or limitations.

Communication on every level is respected and valued, verbal and non-verbal communication are seen as equal, as too is communication through the arts and sports. Being a competent and effective communicator is paramount in interacting with others but also actively listening to others. Discussions and debates occur regularly where we unpack life's questions, or ask the biggest question of all, why?

Collaboration is a constant skill that is worked upon at StartBright. Our environments are purposefully set up in order to promote this at every turn and we constantly praise and support its development within the children. Large, small and individual experiences are facilitated both indoors and out with the purpose of finding our strengths and interests as a

group. We then document this collaboration between others and the environment within our observations and Learning stories.

Critical Thinking is something you may not think of when discussing children under five, yet they are natural critical thinkers. The input of loose parts into our environment's sparks children's intuition, experimentation and hypothesising brains to manipulate, master and work with objects that are open ended and dynamic in their make-up. They are compelled to figure out and understand their world through trial and error.

The Four C's work in harmony with each other and support and guide learning however, another C also plays a huge role and that is Choice. Allowing children choice and to make choices empowers them to seek more. Their choices and the realisation that those choices are listened to shows children that they are active participants in their learning not just bystanders. At StartBright we encourage children to make choices and support their learning while initiating these. Autonomy and agency as you can see throughout our document is ingrained into our practice, children have the opportunity, time and space to navigate through their day making self-directed choices.

The Essential 21st Century Life Skills works in conjunction with StartBright's view of lifelong learning. We wholeheartedly believe that the education and learning you experience in the Early Years never leaves you, merely sets you up to be a well-rounded curious and active learner throughout life.

