

Great expectations

Victoria O'Brien, Headmistress of Rolfe's Nursery School, on aiming high in the early years

In a busy world, it is so easy to lose sight of which elements to focus on when educating our very youngest children. It is often viewed that above all else, the measure of a good education is the pace at which a child learns to read, write and master numeracy skills.

As an early years headmistress and inspector, I disagree with this. A quality early years education must consider much more than the standard approach of rote learning. It should develop the whole child. Of course, children must join their reception class with a sound knowledge of phonics and of numbers but we must not forget the value of the development of a child's character, supporting them to acquire simple life skills, a love of learning and from this, build a lasting self-confidence. Expectation is an incredibly powerful tool. My eight years as a headmistress has shaped my opinion in this regard and now my rather simple philosophy is this; if influential adults in a child's life expect a child to succeed, they will

'A quality early years education is much more than rote learning'



Above
Teaching creatively at Rolfe's
Bottom
A pupil plays with wooden blocks

most likely succeed. Children must be given the opportunity to make a mistake as they grow and learn. They must be able

to try new things and to take risks without repercussion. I would suggest that many of the best learning opportunities in life occur when there is freedom to explore, create and experiment - this is how the light bulb was created and penicillin discovered.

Looking into the future and the growth of artificial intelligence, I would suggest that it is those who have been taught to think creatively and to express their ideas confidently that will be the most professionally sought after. More and more children seem to be reluctant to take a risk and this is having an impact on their learning.

At Rolfe's Nursery School we have a helpful saying 'mistakes are our friends, they help us to learn'.

So what is the best way to prepare a child for the reception year? I would suggest that we look towards empowering children with key skills for the future as a starting point. We at Rolfe's encourage children to develop an 'I can' mentality, building resilience and encouraging each to try new things. We teach them to concentrate for extended periods of time and to persevere when the going gets tough. We catch children 'doing the right thing' and we abundantly praise them for it. We praise children for trying their best (I have repeated the word praise for a reason!).



VICTORIA O'BRIEN
Headmistress of Rolfe's Nursery School

We support children to develop their fine-motor skills so that they are empowered to write, use a computer and to hold a pencil correctly. We work on phonics, writing and numeracy skills in fun and creative ways. In particular we use movement when teaching young children so that we activate both sides of the brain. We teach children manners and how to respect the world and others. 🌍