



## PLANTSBROOK LEARNING POLICY *Written by Staff and Learners of Plantsbrook School*

The document is set out as follows:

1. Defining Learning – What is it and what does it look like?
2. The Key Principles
3. Translating the principles into practice
4. Structuring Learning at Plantsbrook

### 1. Defining Learning – What is it? What does it look like?

The core purpose of our school is for every child to learn. Lessons in Plantsbrook are for learning. Nobody would dispute this, but defining exactly what we mean by learning is a crucial first step in ensuring that our core purpose is a reality.

As a school (pupils and staff), we have recognised how difficult it is to define learning. The whole school team and a learner forum have spent time trying to define learning and have come to an agreement on the following:

- Learning is an **active** process
- Learning is **done by** the learner
- Learning involves making **personal sense** of information and experience. Learning involves receiving and processing information
- At the heart of learning is **understanding and memory**
- Learning can be unpredictable

**In the words of one year 9 pupil 'It's when you get it! When it all makes sense'**

One of the key benefits of reflecting upon the meaning of the word 'learning' is that it presents an opportunity to draw attention to the central role of *understanding* in the learning process. The implications for this are significant:

- Just because it has been taught does not necessarily mean that it has been learned
- The aim of the lesson must be for children to understand new information rather than just receive it

**Teaching involves sharing information – Learning involves making sense of it**

**“Learning, that's when you take in what the teacher is telling you. If you don't that's not learning, that's listening. It's only learning if you think about it!”**

- Can children be making sense when the teacher is inputting or are they just acquiring information at this point?
- It is impossible to tell when inputting who is thinking and who is not. It may be impossible to gauge who is even acquiring information!
- If one child answers a question surely they are making sense? But what about the other 27 pupils? Can we guarantee they are making personal meaning?

**To understand, pupils need to make *personal* meaning, do something with the teacher's input**

**“If I know something I can repeat it in the teacher's words. If I understand it I can explain it in my own words”**

## **Indicators of learning – How do we know pupils are learning? What does ‘making sense’ look like?**

Learning – making meaning- is a bit like the wind: we can't see it, only evidence it because it is personal and goes on inside the individual's head. Many things indicate that learning might be taking place, but it is not so easy to know for sure. We felt that generating some indicators that learning might be taking place is helpful.

- Children explain things in their own words
  - Children are asking questions
  - Children are making connections
  - Children are re-creating
  - Children are frowning (the penny is stuck) and then smiling (the penny drops)
  - Children are talking purposefully to each other
  - Children are doing something with the information (active)
  - Children are offering analogies or metaphors: 'Oh, it's a bit like...'
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## **2. The Key Principles<sup>1</sup>**

We believe children learn best:

When they want to and they believe they can  
When they are fed and watered  
When they interact or collaborate  
When they are active  
When they are engaged  
When they are comfortable, happy and feel safe  
When they ask questions  
When information is explained clearly  
When they are appropriately challenged  
When the information is presented to them in their preferred way (Learning styles)  
When they review  
At the beginning and ends of lesson or learning activities  
When they have 'time outs' or breaks  
When the whole brain is engaged (both sides) and they have to transfer and 'do something' with information  
When they use their 'context' memory

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the views of pupils and staff at Plantsbrook and our understanding of how the brain learns.

### **3. Translating the principles into practice**

#### **1. Children learn best when they interact**

*So we must:*

Provide lots of opportunities for them to work in groups and pairs  
Encourage them to talk to each other and verbalise their thinking

#### **2. Children learn best when they are relaxed and alert**

*So we must:*

Smile!

Greet students as they enter the room

Provide a stimulating environment

Avoid putting children on the spot without time to think or share thoughts with a partner

Endeavour to create challenge rather than stress

Provide some element of choice when demonstrating understanding

#### **3. Children learn best when they want and they believe they can**

*So we must:*

Give learners some choice over their learning

Choose our language very carefully

Encourage them to set personal goals

Help them see the benefits of learning

Give lots of praise!

Set learning activities that are challenges 'I bet you can't....'

#### **4. Children learn best when they review**

*So we must:*

Plan time for pupils to review-Make good use of the last ten minutes

Find out what pupils have learnt in every lesson.

Review learning after each 'making sense' part of a lesson

Remember without review the chances are they will forget.

Provide opportunities at the beginning of lessons to review previous learning

## **5. Children learn best when they are actively engaged**

*So we must:*

Provide activities that require students to 'make sense' of something  
Encourage children to develop understanding  
Encourage children to demonstrate their understanding  
Encourage students to use their understanding

## **6. Children learn best when they encounter something unusual, dramatic or unexpected**

*So we must:*

Exploit the opportunity at the beginning of the lesson to capture students' interest  
Identify the key learning point of each lesson and find different ways of covering it  
Identify the key learning point in each unit of learning and make a conscious effort to introduce it in an unusual way

## **7. Children learn best when they are asking questions, when they are trying to make sense of information**

*So we must:*

Model good questioning-What? /Where? /When? /Why? /How?  
Identify opportunities for learners to ask questions where they feel safe i.e. question box or wall  
Encourage pupils to ask questions of new information

## **8. Children learn best when they know what they are aiming for**

*So we must:*

Provide examples/models of good work  
Be 'up front' about what good learning looks like  
Share with pupils what they are going to learn  
Show learners the purpose of what they are learning and how it can be put to use  
Give learners feedback that encourages them to see or think about the next steps in their learning

## **9. Children learn best when they are challenged to think about information**

*So we must:*

Provide lots of 'making sense' activities

Get pupils to do something with information that we have shared

Encourage pupils to read and do something with text.

Not give them ready-made meaning!

## **10. Children learn best at the beginning of learning experiences**

*So we must:*

Create lots of beginnings in our lessons

Get the learners learning straight away!

Get them thinking straightaway!

Share the main learning point in the first ten minutes

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### **Structuring learning at Plantsbrook**

The learning process involves receiving information and making sense of it. We also know that children learn best when their learning is placed in context and new learning is re-enforced and reviewed. Therefore the school has adopted a learning plan that makes explicit this process.