

# AT WILLIAM BOOTH WE LOVE CHILDREN

*William Booth Nursery and Infant School in Nottingham, under its head, Andy Mattison, provides parents with leaflets describing its philosophy. Much of what is said will be familiar to regular readers of articles on this website, but here are some of the more striking declarations.*

At William Booth we love children and we love helping them to learn. We try to show respect for children's individuality and uniqueness and to develop their sense of themselves as confident and capable lifelong learners.

Schools should above all seek to ensure that their systems, procedures and curriculum protect, support and reinforce children's motivation, confidence and self-esteem and their sense of themselves as good thinkers and clever learners. Far from achieving these aims and supporting children's natural learning, we believe that the formal education system very often damages and prevents it, and creates passive, dependent and unmotivated learners who feel powerless and not respected. We want to avoid this, and we reject over-formal and directive approaches and a narrow restricted curriculum.

Schools should show respect for children as young people with rights and dignity who can and should make their own choices and decisions about their learning.

We learn best when we enjoy what we're doing, because it's easier to work hard when you're having fun, and it's easier to remember what you're

learning when positive emotions are involved. On the other hand, it's much more difficult to learn if you're bored or unhappy.

Inquisitive, eager, well-motivated learners are quite prepared to work very hard at their learning – as is shown by new parents learning about feeding, bathing and changing nappies, and by their babies when they learn to walk. Indeed, very young children have no conception of work, play and learning as separate things.

Later on, school learning can place great demands on children; we recognise that their capacity to work hard depends on their motivation and self-esteem as learners, and on the capacity of their teachers to make the curriculum interesting and enjoyable. We try to do that, and to make sure that children realise that big effort can bring great rewards; that making mistakes is fine ('getting it wrong is part of getting it right') and that persistence and resilience are vital learning skills.

Our speaking and listening skills then become crucial tools for further learning; in particular, they are the vital foundation for reading and writing skills. This means that a silent classroom is not usually a good place for learning!

Especially for young children, learning is ACTIVE and MESSY! We learn by actively exploring and investigating new materials and activities – learning cooking by cooking, painting by painting and football by playing football.

*And from the booklet called "Advice to parents":*

Let them enjoy physical challenges

For young children, movement is generally a key part of learning – movement gets the brain working better. Risk-taking is an essential learning skill, and challenges breed confidence and self-belief.

**Share your memories**

Children love to hear about their parents' childhoods – your home life, your school, the games you used to play – especially your funny stories.

### **Let them solve some problems**

It's tempting for us to want to solve all our children's problems for them, but successful, resilient learners need to feel able to cope with the frustrations and setbacks of problem-solving for themselves.

### **Let children make choices**

Children learn best when they're doing something they've chosen and doing it their way.

### **Sing and dance together**

Kids only get embarrassed about Mum or Dad singing or dancing in public, not at home!

### **Try to see the world through a child's eyes**

For children the world can be mysterious, magical, awe-inspiring and fascinating – but also intimidating, scary and worrying. The more we can appreciate their point of view, the better we can help them.

### **Share day-to-day jobs and activities**

It's true that with young children a job shared can often be a job doubled! But it builds relationships and helps learning which makes it a very worthwhile thing to do.

### **Enjoy playing – join in!**

Being with an interested adult very often makes learning easier and more fun, and builds the skills and attitudes of lifelong learning. Rough and tumble especially can be great fun, and helps to teach children the difference between play and fighting. Go on – re-live your childhood.

### **Let them get out and get messy**

Getting outside is healthier and more fun. The world out there is waiting to be explored. Dirt? It's what baths and washing machines were made for!

### **Let children teach you**

Often the very best way of learning something is to teach someone else. Giving children the chance to be teachers and experts also builds confidence and self-esteem. Let them teach you about their toys or computer games.

### **Believe that your child is great**

Because if you don't they won't either.