



CASE STUDY: DIMPLES DAY NURSERY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Dimples Day Nursery opened in 2002 and is registered to provide care for up to 174 children under 8 years of age, including 36 children under two years of age. The nursery is open each weekday from 7.30am to 6.30pm all year round. It is set in several acres of farmland and with the exception of Bluebell Room (the Baby Room) all children have direct access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area that has been divided to accommodate different aged children. The babies share an outdoor space with toddlers and also make use of the field for 'camping trips'.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE:

Dimples Day Nursery places great importance on the use of outdoors to support children's play and learning. The outdoor space has been developed to ensure that children can be outside in all weathers. Canopies provide shade and shelter, and children have welly boots and water-proof suits for rainy days and hats and sun cream for sunny days. The nursery has resident pets, including rabbits and guinea pigs, that roam freely within the garden and are cared for by staff and children. Outings are a regular part of the nursery routine, and even the very youngest children go on regular trips in the locality, for example to the park and to the woods. Dimples Day Nursery also provides a Forest School experience each week in local woods.

On the hot summer day that I visited I was told all the staff and babies from Bluebell Room were on a 'camping trip' in the field behind the nursery. Bluebell Room takes children from aged 3 months to 15 months so I was intrigued to see what this meant in practice and how the staff would cope with babies' daily care routines in a field! Staff in Bluebell Room had prepared for the 'camping trip' by erecting a large tent and taking out bedding, high chairs, and nappy changing equipment. The field had a permanent shade sail and practitioners and babies based themselves under it with toys and play materials.

Throughout the day practitioners responded to the individual needs of babies in the outdoors in the same way as they would indoors. So, tired babies were put in the tent to sleep, and an outdoor nappy changing station meant that damp bottoms could be easily sorted. At lunchtime the high chairs were moved under the shade sail and when the lunch trolley was wheeled across the grass the babies were given lunch by their key person before being cleaned up for the afternoon activities or a sleep -depending on their individual needs.

BENEFITS AND POSITIVE IMPACT:

The camping trip was a great success and the Bluebell Room practitioners at Dimples Day Nursery have demonstrated beyond doubt that babies can spend plenty of time outdoors without any compromise in standards of care. The babies spent the day in the field and had the benefit of the fresh air, warm breezes, interesting sights and sounds, and multitude of sensory experiences as they crawled through the grass and splashed in the paddling pool, and smelt the grass in the field. Practitioners acknowledged that they had had to think through the logistics of caring for nine babies in a field and work out what they needed to take out with them, however the generous staff ratios ensured that any items that had been overlooked could be fetched easily. The lunch routines were carried out as usual -and although the lunch trolley's journey from the kitchen was rather longer and bumpier, everyone agreed that the sight of the babies eating their lunch outdoors under the shade sail made it all worthwhile!

Further Information:

Outdoor Matters offers training and onsite advice about creating an enabling outdoor environment for children under five. The Outdoor Matters website includes case studies, advice, information and research on making effective use of outdoors.

www.outdoormatters.co.uk