

## Review of the Children's Charter

**Introduction** On Monday 15th April 1996 the governors, teachers, Nursery Nurses and Special School Assistants of Heathside School were invited to spend a whole day together thinking and talking about the children in their care. We considered what we felt were the rights of every child. We discussed how we felt those rights should be recognised, acknowledged and adhered to at all times and by everyone with whom each child comes into contact.

Together we examined our own practice. A role play, performed by two members of staff, gave every one the chance to "be a pupil at Heathside School" for fifteen minutes. The experience made us think how the existing good practice in school should be extended and shared with all adults who have a part to play in the school life of the children. This included parents, school staff, bus escorts, volunteers, governors and many others.

In an attempt to get the most out of the day we worked in groups to look at the fundamental rights of the children. Each group worked from a different perspective. The three perspectives were that of the children themselves, their parents and the school staff. The recording of each group's discussion highlighted the need to work together to achieve a consistency of approach and attitude. This is vital if the children are to feel valued, respected, secure and understood. It is essential if they are to be able to exercise their right to equality of opportunity and the right to achieve their full potential.

At Heathside School we feel strongly that the upholding of the individual rights of every child is the foundation on which everything else is built. We seek to create a school in which we all are valued, adult and pupil alike, for what they are and can become. Because of this we have used our recordings to write a Children's Charter, stating simply and clearly the rights of the children and the aims we work towards together. We want the Charter to be a living document seen to be in evidence in the daily running of the school.

Over the next few pages are the statements which make up the Children's Charter. They are not written in order of importance as each one is equally important. As we read each line we need to pause and reflect on our own practice. We need to consider our own consistency of approach and attitude to each child with whom we come into contact.

In the Autumn Term 2006, the staff at Heathside School reviewed the content of the Children's Charter. Minor amendments were made to the wording of some of the statements but the fundamental rights were still considered to be as relevant in 2006 as they were in 1996.

### The Heathside School Children's Charter

Every child at Heathside School has these four fundamental rights;-

1. To be valued as an individual
2. To be treated with dignity and respect
3. To be educated and cared for as a child first
4. To be safe





## To be valued as an individual

### The Child's Perspective

Every child has this fundamental right:

To be valued as an individual

Being valued as an individual means;

- being valued as I am
- being encouraged to be me
- being talked to by my own name
- being handled by people who know all about me
- being me, as I am, and not being labeled
- having my individual needs recognised
- being given time to do things
- being understood, even if it takes time
- being allowed to have 'off' days
- being allowed to say 'no' sometimes
- being respected at all times
- being included and not excluded
- acknowledging my right to take acceptable risks



### The Adult's Perspective

Every adult has the following responsibility in their involvement with the children:

To value children as individuals

Valuing children as individuals means;

- valuing each child as unique
- talking directly to a child by name
- caring consistently for children in all settings
- not giving children labels
- giving children time to do things
- taking the time to understand what is being communicated
- acknowledging that all children have "off" days
- allowing the child the freedom to say "no" sometimes
- encouraging the children to be themselves
- recognising the individual character of each child
- recognising the individual needs of each child
- respecting each child at all times
- including and not excluding children
- acknowledging that each child has a right to take acceptable risks



## To be treated with dignity and respect

### The Child's Perspective

Every child has this fundamental right:

To be treated with dignity and respect

Being treated with dignity and respect means;

- never being talked about as if I'm not there
- having information about me treated sensitively and carefully
- having my privacy respected at all times and in all places
- being involved in conversations about me
- allowing me to have my own space sometimes
- helping me to be as independent as possible
- communicating with me
- being given information about what is happening before it happens
- having real and meaningful choices offered to me
- having the time and the means to make a choice
- being listened to and being heard
- being involved in decisions that effect me
- being actively encouraged to express my views



### The Adult's Perspective

Every adult has the following responsibility in their involvement with the children:

To treat children with dignity and respect

Treating children with dignity and respect means:

- never talking about children as though they are not there
- treating all information about children with sensitivity and care
- respecting a child's privacy at all times and in all places
- involving a child in conversation about themselves
- addressing every child with respect
- allowing every child to have some space
- helping every child to attain maximum independence
- listening, hearing, seeing and feeling children communicate
- giving a child information about what is happening before it happens eg. being moved, being taken somewhere
- offering real and meaningful choices
- providing the time and means to make a choice
- involving children in the decisions that effect them
- encouraging children to be active in expressing their views
- working together with other adults to offer a coordinated approach



## To be educated and cared for as a child first

### The Child's Perspective

**Every child has this fundamental right:**

**To be educated and cared for as a child first**

**Being educated and cared for as a child first means;**

- being treated as a child, age appropriately
- having the opportunity to play and have fun while learning
- being able to be naughty sometimes
- being able to have friends and acquaintances
- being able to be in school, and accepting that we are all learners
- having access to modes of communications at all times
- being entitled to a range of teaching and learning styles and experiences
- being taught and cared for by staff with the appropriate expertise
- being entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum, including the National Curriculum
- being entitled to an extended curriculum eg. independence skills
- being entitled to a curriculum which is appropriate, relevant and accessible
- having my individual needs met through a differentiated curriculum
- being cared for by people who know and understand me
- having access to appropriate equipment and resources
- having my parents fully involved in any planning about me
- being known as part of my family and being actively supported by them
- having continuity of care between home and school

- having my parents acknowledged as being ultimately responsible for me
- having my self-confidence and self esteem encouraged
- being known as part of my family and being actively supported by them
- having continuity of care between home and school
- having my parents acknowledged as being ultimately responsible for me
- having my self-confidence and self esteem encouraged
- being shown trust
- having opportunities equal to those enjoyed by other children of my age and culture
- being empowered to achieve my maximum potential
- having my achievements noted and celebrated
- feeling secure, and not feeling anxious, powerless or frightened
- benefiting from links with other schools and the community through activities, visitors and visits





## To be educated and cared for as a child first

### The Adult's Perspective

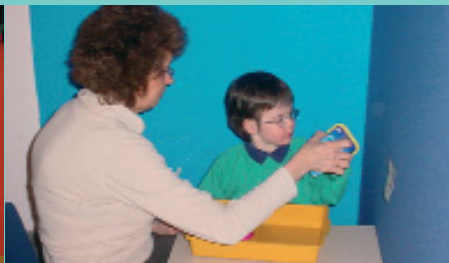
**Every adult has the following responsibility in their involvement with the children**

**To educate and care for children first**

**Educating and caring for children as children first means;**

- treating children as children
- providing opportunities for children to play and have fun while learning
- accepting that children are naughty sometimes
- enabling children to have friends and acquaintances
- acknowledging the children's right to be in school and accepting that we are all learners
- providing a range of teaching and learning styles and experiences
- providing access to modes of communication at all times
- providing staff with the appropriate expertise to teach and care
- providing a broad and balanced curriculum, including the National Curriculum
- providing an extended curriculum eg. independence skills
- providing a curriculum which is appropriate, relevant and accessible
- providing a curriculum which enshrines continuity and progression through school
- providing a differentiated curriculum to meet the individual needs of every child
- having access to appropriate equipment and resources
- involving parents in any planning for their child
- acknowledging a child is part of a family and entitled to be actively supported by them
- providing continuity of care between home and school
- using systems available eg. home/school diary, Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.s) to share information and work together in the child's best interest
- acknowledging that parents have ultimate responsibility for their child
- encouraging children's self esteem and self confidence
- showing trust to a child
- providing opportunities equal to those enjoyed by children of a similar age and culture
- empowering each child to achieve his maximum potential
- noting and celebrating a child's achievements
- making children feel secure and not anxious, powerless or frightened
- providing links with other schools and the community through activities, visits and visitors
- providing an environment that is warm, safe, welcoming and stimulating





## To be safe

### The Child's Perspective

Every child has this fundamental right:

To be safe

Being safe means;

- having a safe environment at home and school
- being protected from abuse, including physical punishment and rough handling
- being protected from emotional abuse, including teasing, taunting, being ignored, frightened, shamed, humiliated, excluded or deliberately misunderstood
- being protected from sexual abuse
- being in school with trained experienced staff who continue to receive training
- knowing that all the important adults in my life are aware of my fundamental rights
- knowing that all the important adults in my life are clear about the procedure if these rights are infringed or not respected



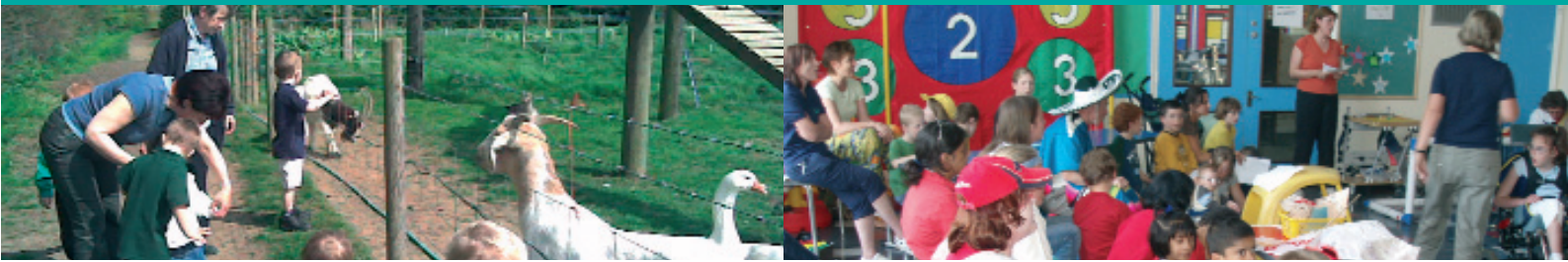
### The Adult's Perspective

Every adult has the following responsibility in their involvement with the children;

To keep children safe

Keeping children safe means;

- providing a safe environment at home and school
- protecting children from abuse including physical punishment and rough handling
- protecting children from emotional abuse including teasing, taunting, being ignored, humiliated, shamed, excluded or deliberately misunderstood
- protecting from sexual abuse including inappropriate touching and indecently exposing a child without due cause
- being in a school with trained experienced staff who continue to receive training
- being part of an integrated service and not letting children hear things that may undermine their faith
- letting the children see that all the important adults in their lives are aware of their fundamental rights
- ensuring that all the important adults in the children's lives are clear about what to do if these rights are infringed or not respected.



## Review of the Children's Charter

### Review of the Children's Charter

During the Autumn term 2006 the staff at Heathside School embarked on a process of exploring and reviewing the Children's Charter and Children First. Many new staff have been appointed since 1996 when the Children's Charter was first drawn up and so did not have an understanding of the reasons behind its creation, or even its contents.

It was a timely exercise for this reason, and also because a large number of new staff had been appointed at the start of the Autumn term 2006. We had clear goals to achieve in relation to the review process and they were as follows:

- To develop a clear understanding of the Children's Charter
- Make any amendments to the Children's Charter
- Look at "what motivates you"
- Investigate learning styles and how we learn in different ways
- Develop a better understanding the learning experiences that the children have
- Unpick what "Children First" means in practice

To help us to focus clearly on the task it was useful to refer back to the introduction of the Children's Charter and the following extract seemed to sum up what we hoped to achieve:

***"As we read each line we need to pause and reflect on our own practice. We need to consider our own consistency of approach and attitude to each child with whom we work".***

The intended outcome of the review process was not just an updated copy of the Children's Charter, but an improvement in the quality of learning experiences that we offered to our children each day. To achieve this it was necessary for everyone involved to examine their daily practice and interaction with the children and to look for ways in which to improve this.

A clear set of guiding principles were also to be drawn up and agreed so that we could challenge each other to ensure that we provided a "consistency of approach and attitude" in how we worked with the children and their families.



## Review of the Children's Charter

### Review of the Children's Charter **OCTOBER 2006**

**During the process of reviewing the Children's Charter we looked again at our central aim:**

***"To have the needs of our children first and foremost in our thoughts and actions at all times."***

**We discussed why we subscribe to this aim and the following reasons emerged:**

- Our values, interests and backgrounds lead us to do it
- To think and act on behalf of our children
- To develop children's learning
- It's what we get paid for
- So that we are consistent
- Because we want to make a difference to children's lives.

It was acknowledged that we, as a group of staff, were not special people in some way but we shared a common purpose. We all wanted to make a difference to the lives of the children with whom we worked, and this was the main motivational factor that lay behind our desire to work at Heathside School.

When we looked at the reasons why we chose to work at Heathside School we identified the desire to make a difference to the lives of the children we work with as the main motivation behind our daily practice.

We went on to delve deeper into the ways in which we could continue to maintain our own levels of motivation, and also how we could motivate each other.

**The following suggestions emerged:**

#### **Motivating Self:**

- Remembering the Children's Charter
- Being optimistic
- Thinking about the positives
- Holding on to the "awe" moments
- Reflecting on the children's achievements
- Talking and sharing with colleagues
- Counting the days to the end of term
- Remembering that no two days are ever the same
- Exercise

#### **Motivating others:**

- Remembering the Children's Charter
- By giving support and encouragement
- Offering praise and acknowledging strengths
- Making everyone feel part of the team
- Listening to others
- Being enthusiastic
- Sharing the positive moments
- Socialising and team building
- Chocolates and cakes
- Getting over the "hump" to the weekend

We acknowledged that the jobs that we do can be stressful, and are emotionally as well as physically demanding, but nonetheless they give us great pleasure and rewards.



## Review of the Children's Charter - October 2006

### Review of the Children's Charter **OCTOBER 2006**

When we reviewed what Children First and the Children's Charter mean, the following points about how we can all work to improve children's learning were suggested:

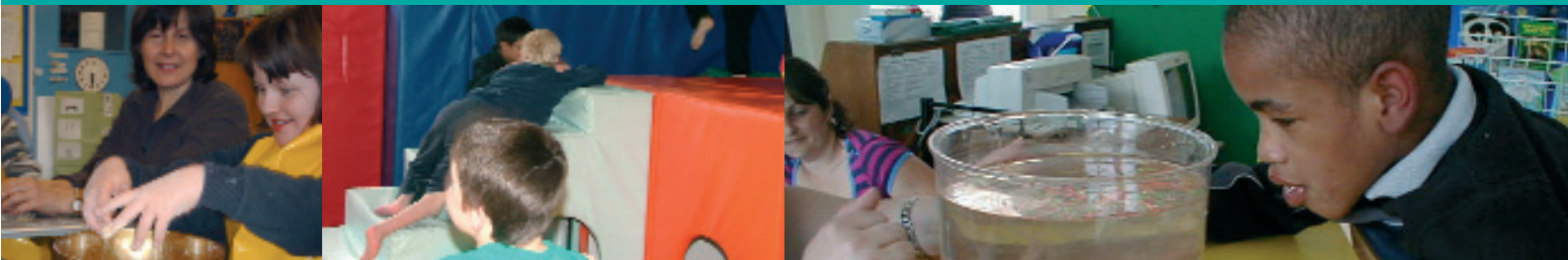
#### Ways of improving children's learning; things to do:

- Make learning fun and enjoyable
- Give children time to respond
- Wait for children to hear and understand what you have said
- Have a sense of humour
- Gain the children's trust
- Let the children take risks and make mistakes
- Be flexible and adaptable – change things if it is going wrong
- Know what you are doing yourself
- Ensure children are comfortable and in the correct equipment
- Use what the children like and enjoy
- Be aware of what the focus of learning is
- Give regular praise and encouragement
- Pitch your language at the appropriate level for the child
- Offer the correct access to communication e.g. symbols, objects, signs etc.
- Think of the needs of all the children you are working with
- Break learning down into small, manageable steps

#### Things that will hinder children's learning; things we would say "Don't do":

- Don't be negative
- Don't rush the child
- Don't shout at the children
- Don't talk over children or about them without involving them
- Don't talk about unrelated topics
- Don't embarrass the child
- Don't get into confrontational battles
- Don't criticise
- Don't presume a child's response, allow them time to respond in their own way
- Don't do the children's art work for them
- Don't ignore the signs – read, interpret and respond according to the child's mood





## Review of the Children's Charter - October 2006

### Review of the Children's Charter

The final session of reviewing the Children's Charter was devoted to drawing up the guiding principles which it is intended will inform our daily practice when working with the children.

All of the feedback from the different sessions was examined to synthesise out the essential elements which could contribute to the guiding principles. The following points emerged and were agreed upon in the final session.

#### At Heathside School we will:

- Live up to the principles of the Children's Charter
- Praise and encourage children
- Develop and offer learning experiences appropriate to each child's needs
- Communicate using methods appropriate to each child
- Respect the individuality and dignity of each child
- Involve children in conversations about themselves
- Involve children in decisions that affect them

These guiding principles will be displayed in every classroom and also in the entrance foyer so that everyone will know what we aim to achieve every day in our work with the children.

