

The Dharma School

Ethos and curriculum policy

Our core objectives

- To offer students Buddhist teachings and practices to support them to develop mindfulness, wisdom and compassion.
- To provide a sound conventional academic education that is informed by the National Curriculum.
- To provide an environment where love of learning is encouraged and students are helped to establish a positive approach to learning and life.
- To foster self esteem and social skills so that students are confident and are able to form respectful relationships with both their peers and adults.

We would like our students to leave our school with a 'good heart', sound ethical values and a sense of responsibility combined with the academic and social skills that enable them to make a successful transition into secondary education. We hope our students will go on to act in ways that benefit themselves, their community, society and the world at large.

Buddhism and education - our approach in practice

The Dharma School fosters an approach to education that promotes the development of compassion, self-knowledge, wisdom and communal responsibility. Students are guided to an understanding of themselves and others and life's lessons through experiences and insights into the Dharma - the teachings of The Buddha.

The Buddhist ethos is integrated into classroom work and these are some of the ways this is achieved:

- regular meditation practice to familiarise students with their inner world of thoughts and feelings
- discussion and reflection on Buddhist teachings, such as cause and effect, interdependence and impermanence, to help students develop their understanding of the way things are
- the teaching of basic Buddhist principles, such as the five precepts, so that students develop understanding of how to live wholesome lives. The precepts are written on page four
- presenting various teachings of The Buddha such as the four noble truths and sayings from The Dhammapada so that children gain knowledge of the Dharma.
- introducing Buddhist teachers and followers (such as monks, nuns and committed lay followers) to the school and its community, so that Buddhist lifestyles are seen and opportunities are provided for interaction with the visitors for the students and the community.

- introducing students to a physical meditative activity such as the practice of yoga or tai chi to promote mind-body awareness as well as coordination, balance and good physical health.
- promoting positive qualities and ethical values by studying appropriate stories, biographies and mythologies as well as exploring themes in role play and drama.

School Puja

The weekly whole school puja is an important event that contributes to the sense of community and establishes the tone of the school. All members of the school community are invited to attend.

In Buddhism the word 'puja' means a devotional act or ceremony, and although the school pujas mainly focus on the children's work and school activities there is a spiritual aspect which links us back to our Buddhist ethos, for example, the puja takes place in front of our shrine and often contains a meditation or a chant for well being. It usually contains some or all of the following:

- meditation
- activity – role plays, poems, stories, songs, or some aspect of children's work
- chanting
- school news
- talks from the headteacher, Buddhist representatives or other educational/spiritual visitors

Daily puja also occurs in each class on all other days. The activities conducted during daily pujas generally focus on a P.S.H.E. (personal, social and health education) or Buddhist theme often related to an issue in the school or classroom, such as respect for others, taking responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings or actions, self reflection, change, dealing with difficulties or caring for others.

Promoting mindfulness in thinking, feeling and action

One of the main aims of The Dharma School is to promote mindfulness. It is through mindfulness that students learn to behave ethically, to show respect and compassion to other beings and to develop the qualities of acceptance, patience and honesty.

To help children develop these qualities we endeavour to create an environment within the school in which:

- each student feels secure, happy and free to express themselves naturally without fear of recrimination or punishment
- all members of staff, teaching and non-teaching, display the qualities we wish the students to express
- students are helped to overcome unhealthy mind states that interfere with mindful action

- all situations are seen as opportunities to practice and promote mindfulness

Discipline is understood as a quality students need to develop in the form of mindful self-discipline rather than something to be imposed through rules and regimentation. Self-discipline is promoted by helping students understand how all members of the school community depend on each other and that by considering others they will receive consideration in return.

When a student's behaviour indicates anxiety or fear in any of their forms and becomes disruptive or offensive to others, teachers are expected to investigate the likely source of the student's disturbance as outlined in the school's anti-bullying policy and discipline policy.

The school community

The general culture and atmosphere in the school creates a background against which all learning takes place. In this sense the whole school community acts like a sangha: a community committed to upholding the school's values through individual practice and example.

All families in the community that is this school are expected to follow the five Buddhist precepts and sign to this commitment on registering their children with the school or on undertaking employment at the school.

A strong emphasis is placed on establishing a sense of community through events that promote common understanding in the context of a Buddhist ethos, such as weekly puja, festival days and school concerts. These are a key part of the life of the school, and on these occasions staff and students work closely together on presentations that reflect the work of the classes and the school's aims.

The Five Precepts for our School and Community

I will not intentionally harm people, animals, plants and any part of our school environment, caring for them in a way I would like to be cared for myself or looking after the school in a way I would like my own belongings to be looked after.

I will not take things that belong to others, remember to ask when borrowing, and try to share when appropriate.

I will try to be caring towards my friends and be respectful at all times even to those who are not my friends.

I will try to say things that are honest and truthful, and be mindful in my speech and voice.

I will try to keep my body fit and healthy and my mind calm and clear by following that which brings health and happiness.

Buddhist understanding applied to standard subjects

Buddhist understanding provides a framework within which other subjects are studied and interpreted. For example, we recognize the consequential nature of actions (karma) when teaching humanities and science, and this helps students to develop awareness of ethics and global responsibility. In history, we often teach from the perspective of interdependence, rather than division and difference. This offers a 'one world' view in which all nations are regarded as dependent on each other and strive to assist each other for the good of the whole. In this light, war and conflict are shown as largely counterproductive and destructive.

In RE we teach more about Buddhism than other religions but also offer comparative religious studies, share important religious days and celebrations from different religions and study spiritual leaders from many spiritual traditions. In PSHE (personal, social and health education) the children learn about change and impermanence, and develop compassion for others by learning of life's difficulties and conflict resolution as well as taking responsibility, looking after yourself and others and building self esteem. In addition, the reflective quiet that can arise from meditation helps students adopt a calm and focused approach to study.

Academic curriculum

The school offers a broad and balanced academic curriculum that enables students to access the following different areas of learning experience:

- **linguistic:** listening, speaking, reading, writing and second language (French) - developing the ability to listen and to read, with and for pleasure, to be able to convey meaning accurately and appropriately through speaking and writing for a variety of purposes
- **mathematical:** numerical, spatial, scientific and practical - developing the ability to think and solve problems mathematically in a variety of situations using number and the number system, calculations, problem solving, practical applications, measurement, shape and space, and handling data
- **scientific:** observation, enquiry, discussion, use of technology, environment - developing an enquiring mind and a scientific approach to problems,
- **social and political:** history, geography, society and its institutions - acquiring knowledge about geographical, historical and social aspects of the world and local environment, and appreciation of cultural differences
- **physical:** coordination of mind and body - developing agility, physical co-ordination and confidence through movement in physical education
- **aesthetic and creative:** art, craft, design, drama and music - the opportunity to gain experience of communicating knowledge, feelings and ideas through various art forms

- **spiritual and ethical:** Buddhism and other religions, ethical values and relationships - gaining knowledge of the difference, diversity and significance of religious paths and beliefs

Early Years curriculum

In the Early Years the school follows The Early Years Foundation Stage, which is the first stage of the National Curriculum. The Buddhist ethos of the school underpins our work within this framework, supporting the learning, development and welfare of children aged from three until the end of the reception year. The Early Years Foundation Stage has six areas of learning: Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication, Language and Literacy, Problem-solving, Reasoning and Numeracy, Knowledge and Understanding of the World, Physical Development and Creative Development. Each area of learning has early learning goals, which set out the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes which it is hoped the children will reach by the end of the reception year. Children's achievement at this stage is recorded in the Foundation Stage Profile.

Implementation

Plans and schemes of work

The head teacher is responsible for developing policies on the individual subject areas and for working with teachers to make sure there are agreed and integrated plans and schemes of work in place covering the following:

- a yearly plan overview
- a scheme of work for every half term giving a detailed overview of the half-termly topic and general overview of each subject area
- each lesson plan has a planned sequence and will generally be governed by a learning objective

Subject areas

The curriculum is organised into the following subject areas and is frequently covered by a thematic or topic approach through which different subjects are integrated into the topic of study:

Literacy	Numeracy	French	
Science	History	Geography	
Religious education	Civic studies	Art	
Physical education	Computer studies	Music	PHSE

Planning in the Early Years

In the Sunflower and Dragonfly Classes, yearly plans outline a structure of open-ended themes which allow us to provide a rich and varied programme throughout the year. We carefully listen to children and observe their achievements, behaviour and preferences, and then plan to provide a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities which will support their learning and development appropriately.

Differentiation

Teachers involve teaching assistants and the school SENCO in assessing children with individual educational plans (i.e.p's). Teachers plan differentiated lessons for children with individual learning needs and to involve teaching assistants in helping children with i.e.p's.

Teachers plan enrichment or differentiated learning opportunities for children who need further challenges. Children who have developed a mastery or competency within a strand of a subject area may be asked to help other children.

Monitoring and assessment

The following are the main ways the work and progress of students is monitored and assessed:

- Teachers mark or assess student's work informally or formally to decide how a subject or a child's learning may be taken forward.
- Students are taught and prepared to for KS2 SATS tests in English, Maths and Science through practice papers and past tests.
- Teachers develop student profiles based on the annual student report and information passed or gathered from the previous school year and further anecdotal notes from assessment during the school year.
- Teachers periodically gain feedback from students about their own learning and understanding of their own progress.
- Teachers keep records of topic work containing both examples of planned lessons and of student's work.

Keeping parents informed

The school places great emphasis on teachers being readily accessible to parents to discuss their child's work and progress and any concerns they may have.

Meetings with parents are held at least twice a year to report on and discuss their child's work and progress. More regular meetings may take place with parents of children with i.e.p's.

Parents receive full written reports towards the end of each school year to give an overall assessment of their child's achievements, strengths and, where applicable, weaknesses.

Class meetings are held twice a year to report to parents on curriculum and school activities. Feedback from parents about the school is invited regularly using a questionnaire format and in general meetings.

Monitoring and review

The head teacher will report to the board of directors on this policy and its implementation. In particular, the head teacher will report on areas identified

for improvement, SATS results and parental feedback. There is a nominated director with oversight of this policy. Every two years this policy will be reviewed by the board of directors.

Last revised 17th September 2009
Peter Murdock