

HOW THE FFL EARLY YEARS AWARD CAN DEVELOP EXISTING GOOD PRACTICE



The Birkbees Nursery Group is a collection of four nurseries in Huddersfield. The nurseries range from having 32 places to 85 in one setting and cater for a diverse group of children from many different backgrounds. The Birkbees Nursery Group was one of two nurseries who were the first to achieve the national FFL Early Years Award after participating in the pilot programme, supported by Kirklees Council.

Using the Food for Life award framework to develop existing good practice

Before enrolling on the Food for Life Early Years programme, Birkbees were committed to providing the children in their care with good food and food education. They believed that the Food for Life Early Years award would not only provide an independent endorsement of their good work, but could also give expert support and focus to their activities. They also hoped that it would give children, families and staff more opportunities to continue their healthy approach to teaching and learning.

Since joining the Food for Life Early Years programme, Birkbees have used the flexible award framework, expert guidance, training and resources to extend the reach of their existing work, focus their efforts and show the wider world they are providing tasty, nutritious meals in an environment that creates great social skills.

Food Quality

In accordance with Food for Life award criteria, at least 75% of dishes provided to children are freshly prepared, all eggs are free-range and meat is from farms which satisfy UK welfare standards. Birkbees use a range of local suppliers to provide food to suit the mix of different cultures and dietary requirements within their communities, reflecting the needs of the children in their care. Birkbees encourage children to explore new flavours, trying foods from different cultures including Thai, Kurdish, Chinese, Indian and Arabic, whilst being aware not to make flavours so strong that they become unpalatable for the children. Staff join in with trying these new dishes and talk about the sight, smell, taste and texture of the food in a positive way.

In line with the award criteria, they are also compliant with the Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings

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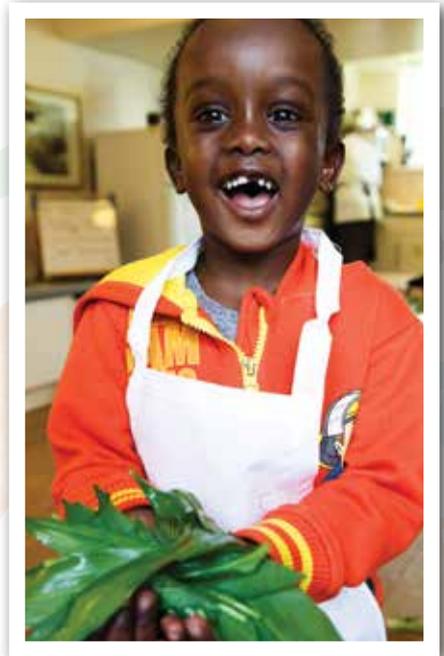
Director, Birkbees Nursery



Cooking and Growing

Drawing on ideas from the Food for Life resources, the Birkbees Group has worked hard to extend their cooking and growing sessions, supporting the development of good food habits. Children have weekly opportunities to take part in cooking activities with the nursery chef, discussing what foods they like and dislike and using a range of age appropriate utensils. Children are able to experience and discuss the smells of bread baking, onions frying and peppers roasting. Parents and staff often comment on the delicious aromas in the nursery!

Growing is also a vital part of the curriculum at Birkees. All children visit a local allotment where they use growing to develop their language, numeracy and motor skills. They grow a variety of fruits, vegetables and herbs, and are engaged in the whole growing process, first preparing the growing area with compost, sowing the seeds and tending the crops, before harvesting and cooking with the produce.



Food education

Birkbees are passionate about equipping children with the knowledge to give them the best possible start to their food journey. This is scaled up through the nurseries from the youngest babies to the pre-school rooms. Visits are scheduled throughout the academic year to local markets, supermarkets, specialist shops and to the local farm, where children can see first-hand where their food comes from. These activities are followed up with tasting sessions, discussions and sensory activities. After a visit to the Chinese supermarket, artefacts and produce were used in sensory activities such as smelling herbs and spices, using noodles in tactile trays and playing with chopsticks and bamboo mats in role play activities.

To extend the children's curiosity to match and compare, fruits and vegetables are added to the play area, giving children the opportunity to touch, feel and smell the outside of different fruit and vegetables and match them with corresponding pictures of the insides. Children use different media including play dough and clay to make fruit and vegetables; discussing colours and textures and how they can simulate these in their models. Children also print with different fruit and vegetables, thinking about the different textures, skin layers, colours and shapes.

Engaging staff, parents and the community

Birkbees believe that engaging parents has been key to them achieving their award. It has also meant that the positive food culture created at nursery has the opportunity to extend into children's homes.

Staff have worked hard to ensure that families are involved in their Food for Life journey, keeping parents and guardians engaged through their Facebook page, newsletter and notice boards. Parents have also contributed to menu planning, making suggestions based on their families' favourite meals. A Grandparent Growing Day was also held and proved to be very popular, with grandparents from the baby room, 'tweenie' area and preschool rooms all planting sunflower seeds with the children.

The Food for Life framework has provided the theme for family stay and play sessions and cooking demonstrations, offering parents the chance to learn healthy recipes that their children can help cook at home. The Birkbees group is lucky enough to be surrounded by culturally rich communities, and in these sessions parents are encouraged to talk about the foods they cook and eat, and to submit recipes for the Birkbees cook book.

Inspiring a dedicated team

None of this work could have been possible without the commitment of the whole Birkbees team. Tracey Fenton, director of Birkbees Nurseries said:

“Our Food for Life work has given our families and staff a better understanding of all aspects of food. The resources are so well presented that they appeal to all staff and we particularly like the additional web links for further information.

“The training offered to staff was also a great way to keep them motivated. The delivery and the venues were fantastic, not something we could have done on our own. When we made guacamole, not all of the staff had even tried an avocado before, now they input ideas into our menu planning and act as positive role models for the children, eating with them and never bringing unhealthy food or branded drinks into areas where children play.”

Birkbees' good work doesn't stop at the nursery gate. Through the sharing of their Food for Life work they are making links with local schools, essential to providing an easy transition from nursery to school for the children. Reception teachers have been invited to lunch and Birkbees are keen to continue to share their learning with other local nurseries through network groups.

Tracey summarised why she would encourage other nurseries to join the Food for Life Early Years award programme:

“As a nursery we are aware that the first experiences around food and healthy eating are so important and offer a vital springboard into healthy living and embed this thread throughout the Early Years Foundation stage.”

“I would most definitely recommend the programme to other Early Years providers as a way of bringing existing good practice together under one award, whilst further developing learning and teaching. The award brings so many more ideas for teaching, so no longer will buns be the only things on the food activity planning!”

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Director,
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BIRKBEES RECIPE: TOMATO & LENTIL LASAGNE MAKES 12 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 250g brown or green lentils, boiled and drained
- 2 large onions finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves crushed
- 200g each of carrot/courgette/peppers (or any other seasonal vegetables)-small diced
- 2 Tins chopped tomatoes or 1kg of fresh ripe tomatoes finely chopped
- 4 Tbls tomato puree
- 350ml vegetable stock
- 1 tsp oregano, basil & black pepper
- 500g Lasagne sheets
- 1Ltr white sauce
- 100g grated cheese to top



METHOD

1. Fry the onion, garlic and vegetables until soft and coloured
2. Add the lentils, tomatoes, tomato puree, stock and seasoning and cook until the vegetables are soft
3. Layer the vegetable mixture with the lasagne sheets and white sauce. Finish with white sauce and top with grated cheese.
4. Cook for 35-45 minutes until the top is golden and the pasta is cooked.

FIND OUT MORE

- ✓ **Contact:** Siân Creagh-Osborne, Awards Programme Manager
- ✓ **Email:** screagh-osborne@soilassociation.org
- ✓ **Call:** 0117 314 5180
- ✓ **Visit:** www.foodforlife.org.uk/early-years

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