



HAPPY HEDGEHOGS

EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

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THE CLASSROOM

The Classroom is organized to suit the age, needs and interests of the children. Each class provides important permanent learning areas and others which will change during the course of the year as the children themselves develop other interests and needs. The classroom has been divided into the following main areas:

The Home Corner

The role-play area of the class is designed to stimulate communication and promote socialization. It has a play kitchen including a sink, oven and hob, saucepans, cutlery, plates and cups, empty food packaging, sponges and small containers of different colors and a washing machine. Inspired by the children, this corner can change during the year as their interests grow.

Who is Here Today Area

This is an important display in the classroom and part of the children's daily routine at school. It is a visual register that the children can refer to throughout the day and becomes a basis for mathematical and language development as the teachers and children talk about who is present and who is absent from school. Each morning they play games with their photographs and sing name games using this display.

The Carpet Area

The Carpet Area is an important focal point in the classroom where the children meet to listen to stories, sing songs and enjoy language focus moments with their friends and teachers.

The Art Area

This is the area where tables are set up for arts & craft activities with materials to explore. On the wall there are shelves containing crayons, markers, paint, watercolors, white and colored paper, ready for our little artists to experiment with and to express themselves.

Shelves

A large set of pigeon-hole shelves with pull out boxes contain different educational toys and games from which the children can choose from during free- play. There are building blocks, puzzles, board games, role-play animals and so on.

The Busy Corner

This is a big area on the wall with a “busy board” where the children can explore ‘real’ objects, such as telephones, light switches, wheels, etc.

The SMART Board

The interactive whiteboard is a fun feature in the classroom for the children to use, always under the supervision of their teachers. It is used to introduce a variety of cross-curricular topics, to reinforce language skills, to draw, to share photographs, to link up with other classes in our school and to connect to Happy Hedgehogs’ Google Classroom. The SMART Board opens up a world of technology which is literally at their fingertips.

OTHER AREAS

The Gym

The Gym is visited regularly by the children where they participate in a variety of activities, such as races, obstacle courses, ball and hoop games. Through such activities, the children develop a wide range of skills such as pushing and pulling, crawling, forward rolls, balancing, catching and throwing, as well as working on their cooperation skills by working together in small groups. The gym is also used for drama, role-play, relaxation activities, dance, road safety activities and to develop the ability to listen and to follow instructions in English and Italian.

The Gardens

The Gardens both gardens are used frequently by the children and provide two, well-divided green areas equipped with a train, a house, climbing frames and slides. Here, the children can continually

develop their fine and gross motor skills, expand their social skills, role-play and use their imaginations. These spaces are precious outdoor 'classrooms' where children have the opportunity to observe and come into contact with nature as they hunt for insects, look after the school pets and plants. They can experiment, test their skills and consequently grow through these rich and meaningful outdoor experiences.

THE FAMILY AND SCHOOL

From the very start of the school year we aim to build a special relationship between parents, home and the school. We provide particular moments in which parents can meet with teachers to follow their child's education.

Individual parents' meetings at the start of the school year are held at the end of **August / beginning of September**. Parents receive an invitation from school during the summer holidays. These valuable meetings offer parents and class teachers an opportunity to meet each other, to exchange useful information about the child and to plan for the settling in period.

A coffee morning in the first few week of **September** is organized for all the Early Years classes, parents and staff as an opportunity to get to know each other over a coffee and a special snack in the garden.

A general parents' meeting with all the Early Years parents and teachers takes place in **October** to present the year's planning, projects and other notices. Class and school representatives are also elected during this meeting. A second meeting with all the Early Years parents and teachers takes place in **March** to keep parents up-to-date with the annual project, class news and to present the end-of-year trips.

Individual meetings with class teachers are available for parents who would like an update or who need to talk to the teachers about their child. These provide a useful opportunity for families and teachers to work together and focus on the child's learning journey. Appointments can be made throughout the year by telephoning the school office.

Individual end-of-year meetings are provided for parents who would like to receive feedback about their child's school year and may have questions about the new academic year. Parents are invited

to start booking appointments from **May** onwards in the class teachers' appointments by telephoning the school office.

School events are an important way of involving families in school life, encouraging socialising and cooperation and helping to develop a sense of belonging to the Smiling community. Typical annual family events include the Christmas Show, International Week, Book Day and Sports Day.

Believing that communication with pupils' families is of primary importance, SMILING has set up the following channels of communication:

Informative articles which feature in local newspapers to present various initiatives, occasional advertisements and brochures.

The website www.smilingsservice.it where practical information (registration forms, schedules, menus, An Extra Smile events letter and educational information are included.

An Extra Smile is a friendly monthly newsletter, written in English, which groups the most important social events taking place in Ferrara and its province. Its aim is to help new families from abroad or families who have just moved from other Italian cities, to settle into our town and to take advantage of its numerous historical and cultural events. Families can subscribe for free on the website or by emailing anextrasmile@smilingsservice.it

E-mails are the most important channel of communication with families. Of course, notices for families are also displayed on the notice boards at the entrance and these are updated regularly and archived. The office staff are also available to help at the allocated times.

Google Classroom enables families to actively participate in their child's school life, with a view to an education alliance. Teachers and parents can access it daily to share educational goals and to allow the students themselves to create a dialogue between home and school.

The Electronic Register is a quick and easy tool for parents where they can check their child's 'Diario di Bordo' (logbook) in case of any messages and read about the class's daily activities.

Open Days are held in the period prior to enrollment to present Early Years, Primary School and Secondary School to the school's parents and students as well as any future students.

The Coordinators and School Principal are available by appointment for any specific needs.

Other Schools and Universities - Smiling school runs successful collaborations with the schools and universities in the local area by welcoming students from Liceo Superiore G. Carducci in Ferrara – which has been in place for over ten years. Through the "Alternanza scuola-lavoro" scheme, students can consolidate their studies in an educational setting and have their first taste of work experience which is in line with their study plan.

Smiling also collaborates with the University of Bologna (UNIBO) and Ferrara by providing training internships for those who request them.

Smiling's Early Years has been the leader of some innovative projects and in sharing these with other Nursery Schools.

The City and the Territory play an important role in school activities which are enriched by various extracurricular proposals, aimed at in-depth disciplinary and project activity. There are many initiatives and educational projects with exciting learning objectives. These often involve our young students, as well as the older ones, who benefit from the services and support of both public and private entities.

SETTLING-IN

The settling-in period is important for all the people involved. For the child, it is the first moment that he/she experiences an unfamiliar environment with other children and adults. It is also the first moment of separation from the parents and for this reason the process has to be gradual and personalised for each child. For parents it is often a time of anxiety so their presence in the class for the first few days is very important in order to allow a serene separation from the child and to develop trust in the teachers who will care for the child. For teachers, it is a crucial stage as they begin to get to know the children, the parents and their class. Using this information, the teachers begin to build a relationship with each child. By observing and understanding the relationship which each child has towards his/her classmates, the environment and objects, they are able to create a welcoming and stimulating environment for each child on a daily basis. There is not a 'set rule' for the settling-in period. We believe that each child has different needs and we give him/her the necessary time in

order for them to feel 'safe' and settled. Parents and teachers will decide together what method is best for their child.

The Importance of Routine

A good daily routine helps children to feel safe and secure in an environment as it provides stability and continuity. In this situation, children know that their needs will be met and consequently they begin to feel more confident to explore their surroundings by themselves. The daily routines become an important reference point for the children during their day and they begin to look for these moments to help them to make sense of time in an increasingly precise and conscious way. The routine also allows children to internalise what comes before and what comes after. They can then begin to 'imagine' what will soon happen and reflect on what has just happened.

The Importance of Play

Play allows children to discover, feel, make decisions and make choices, actions which they will then experiment with in real life. Through play children begin to learn to respect the rules and learn essential skills for their development. Through taking part in the structured activities created by the teachers, the children develop their cognitive skills and grow in a balanced way.

The Importance of Observations

Observation is a privileged methodology that is useful for monitoring the different stages of child development and helping children to reach their full potential. Each child is different and each child develops in his/her own time. This is very important and should be respected and valued.

Observations allow teachers to build and create a personalized educational path around each child and respond to individual needs.

ACTIVITIES

A Typical Day

A typical day in the Happy Hedgehogs class offers the children the opportunity to freely explore the classroom, choosing what they would like to do. There is also time dedicated to more structured

activities and projects, led by one or more teachers. Importance is given to both and to the daily routines as these give the children numerous opportunities for the children to learn.

The activities are divided into different learning areas:

- **artistic activities** - the exploration of materials and techniques to develop fine motor skills, creativity and imagination;
- **cognitive development activities** - categorization of objects of different consistency, shape, size and color;
- **linguistic activities** - role-play, stories, rhymes and songs in both Italian and English;
- **motor skills activities** - fine motor skills: development of hand-eye coordination through pouring, filling, emptying, rolling, throwing, making towers. Gross motor skills: jumping, crawling, sliding, catching, throwing activities which will take place in the classroom, gym and garden;
- **personal and social activities** - free and structured group games to develop social skills;
- **music** – discovering movement, rhythm, melody as well as developing listening skills, the memory and creativity.

Early Years Annual Project

All the Early Years classes work on an annual project. This project aims to stimulate not only the children's physical and emotional well-being but also the development of their intellectual capacities. There are opportunities for all the children to work together as a whole class, in small groups or individually, as well as working with the children from other Early Years classes. They put on shows for each other, exchange and share ideas and work, have tea and snack together and so on. The Early Years classes, together with Primary school, celebrate international days, festivals and other important dates in the school. Throughout the year the school organizes outings within the surrounding area: walks, trips, visits to museums, theatre show, farm visits.

The English and Italian Language

Activities and the daily routine are carried out in both languages. Italian is spoken by the Italian teachers and English is spoken by the English teachers. All the teachers plan activities and the children's day together. They also work together in the classroom modelling the idea of communicating in different ways. During the day the children have a specific focus time in each language with the corresponding teacher. In this way the children learn to distinguish the different sounds belonging to the different languages and learn which adult represents which language. Hearing two languages (and maybe even a third if there is a family from another country) becomes a natural part of their day.

Civic Education

From an early age, it is important that children learn how to stay together in a group and develop values that foster their own and others' well-being. All the Early Years classes develop communication, language and social skills to help children interact and play cooperatively. This, in turn, contributes to creating a feeling of community and comfort within the classroom and the school beyond. Each class creates friendship and kindness projects, while teachers continually model and reinforce appropriate language. A helping hand, a polite gesture or kind word are skills for life and help children to become good citizens.

The Early Years children also learn about recycling and looking after the environment in collaboration with HERA and other associations. Trips to local parks, farms, art galleries, the theatre as well as visits from the police and firemen for example, encourage children to take an interest in their city and to experience Ferrara as a community.

Early Years' Google Classroom

When families join our school, they are given an @smilingsservice.it account for each child which gives them access to Google Classroom and other useful platforms.

Each class has its own virtual classroom where teachers post photos of activities and special events. They can also share extra activities, songs or games linked to class topics. This is ideal for parents who would like to take part in school life and reinforce learning at home. It is also a place where

information about the class or Early Years can be posted, just like a virtual noticeboard. Families are encouraged to visit Google Classroom regularly and are welcome to post comments or photos of work done by the children at home.

Interclass Activities

The Early Years annual project, international festivals and school events unite all the classes and enable teachers to plan special moments of collaboration and exchange between the children from the various age groups. Classes make fun videos for each other, meet up live online, exchange gifts and visit each other's classes to do 'Show and Tell' activities.

Music

Music ignites all areas of children's development and skills for school readiness, including intellectual, social-emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy. It helps the body and the mind work together. Dancing to music helps children build motor skills while allowing them to practice self-expression. The children have music with the school's English music teacher each week. During this precious time, the children explore a variety of instruments and develop listening skills and rhythm. They acquire a repertoire of songs while dancing and moving to music from around the world. The music teacher works with the class teachers to link activities to class topics too.

Smiling's Continuity Project

Smiling International School welcomes pupils from the age of 2 to 18, which is why it is important for us to develop projects and initiatives between all the various school orders. This provides continuity for families, the teachers and most importantly for the children as they move up through our school. Smiling organizes 'Open Days' for Early Years, Primary, Middle and High School. Parents whose child already attends Smiling receive an invitation to this event which is also open to new parents.

The Early Years children take part in a fun 'Induction morning' in June when they have the opportunity to spend the morning in the next class up to do an activity with the new teachers. It is an important project for all the classes, especially for the Happy Hedgehogs who experience Nursery School for the first time and for the Butterflies who get to spend a morning in Primary School.

Interclass activities, the House Teams, Smiling events and international celebrations are special occasions to bring all the children together and create a sense of community.

Before the new school year begins, coordinators and teachers meet to pass on all the necessary information about the class and each child to the new teachers, providing a valuable stepping stone for the transition and continuity between each year group and school order.

DAILY ROUTINES

Snack

The morning snack is eaten before the daily activities begin at 9.45 a.m. It is a time to sit together, taste new foods and develop language skills. The afternoon snack is eaten after sleep time at around 3.40 p.m. Both snacks are provided by the school and consist of a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, crackers or biscuits. Every Friday the school cook prepares a special snack for the children of cake, pizza, biscuits or yogurt.

Lunch

The Hedgehogs eat lunch, which is prepared by the school cook, at 11.50 a.m. in a designated classroom, together with their teachers. Lunch is an important time for socialization between both teachers and children, and between the children themselves, and for this reason it is a fundamental part of the educational project. Lunchtime for the children is an opportunity to develop their autonomy and learn new skills which will help build their identity. Becoming more independent at the table is an important objective for the Happy Hedgehogs. From using their fingers to pick up food as babies, they move on to learn how to use a spoon or fork and develop skills that reinforce their identity. By being introduced to different foods, children discover a whole new world of colors, flavours, smells and new textures. The menu offers a variety of healthy and well-balanced dishes, which include regional cooking. International festivals are also celebrated and the children are encouraged to try dishes from around the world.

Brushing Teeth

The Happy Hedgehogs brush their teeth after lunch supervised by an adult. This is an important part of their day at school to encourage them to follow a good dental hygiene routine from a young age.

Afternoon Nap

An afternoon nap is important for small children, as it is a moment of relaxation after lunch and free-play. The children sleep in the familiar surroundings of their classroom accompanied by their teacher or assistant who often reads a story and sets up soft music. Special attention is given to the individual needs of each child.

The Happy Hedgehogs have their own nursery school bed complete with a bottom sheet. These are both provided and cleaned by school each week. A pillow, pillowcase and blanket are provided by the family and are given home every Friday to be cleaned and returned to school on Mondays. Any dummies (which must have a container) are sent home every day to be sanitised.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

A Confident Learner

Competent learners from birth, babies who are just a few hours old gaze at patterns which resemble the human face in preference to others. They are able to distinguish between things, and show that they like some better than others. In this way, young children learn to discriminate and make connections between different objects and experiences. Children make increasing sense of the world as connections are made. As babies and toddlers, they explore their surroundings through touch, sight, sound, taste, smell and movement. Their sensory and physical exploration affects the patterns that are laid down in the brain. Through repeated experiences of people, objects and materials, young children begin to form mental images which lead them to imitate, explore and re-enact as they play imaginatively with materials and resources, using all the senses. They also begin to engage in pretend play using gestures and actions. Through this type of play, children start to express feelings and form relationships as their language skills develop enabling them to communicate and express ideas.

Children become creative through exploration and discovery as they experiment with sound, media and movement.

A Healthy Child

For babies and young children, being special to someone and cared for is vital for their physical, social and emotional health and well-being. Health and social well-being underpin and determine children's responses to their environment, to people and to new experiences. Being protected and keeping safe and secure with adult support, ensures that babies and young children quickly become skillful in a wide range of movements involving both large and fine motor control.

A skilful Communicator

To become skilful communicators, babies and children need to be together with a key person and others in warm and loving relationships. Being together leads to the wider development of social relations, which include friendship, empathy, sharing emotions and experiences, and becoming a competent language user. Early attempts at finding a voice are rewarded in a variety of ways, increasing confidence and encouraging children to extend their range and increase their skills. Learning to make sense of the sounds around them is not a simple task. Babies respond differently to some sounds over others and, from an early age, are able to distinguish sound patterns. They use their voices to make contact and to let people know what they need and how they feel. They learn the 'rules' of communication through making meaning with their key person and with other supportive adults and other children. It is in these relationships that their early attempts to converse are interpreted, responded to and valued.

A Strong Child

The beginnings of autonomy can be seen in the relationships which exist as babies and young children play and explore alongside a close, attentive, warm and sensitive adults. In order to become strong, the baby needs a nurturing environment in which their key person plays an essential role. By encouraging and supporting decision-making, empathising and providing opportunities for children, the key person helps them grow emotionally, so that they are able to respond to successes and challenges. Being acknowledged and affirmed by important people in their lives leads children to gain confidence and inner strength. Exploration within close relationships leads to the growth of self-

assurance, promoting a sense of belonging which allows the young child to explore the world from a secure base.