QUALITY AREA 1 – EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

STRENGTHS

The educational program and practice at Cranston Street Kindergarten is viewed by the Kindergarten community and our peers as a strength. We have lead professional development sessions with school, kindergarten and family day care providers. Staff believe that learning is a lifelong process and as such we are actively involved in research (currently the Eyre Screening for Phonological Awareness Project), we consistently update our knowledge and improve our practice. Whole staff training and development are seen as a priority and wherever possible all staff attend training together, this practice enhances the ownership and understanding of new knowledge and therefore acceptance and rapid uptake of new ideas and it also contributes toward the development of innovative practices. As a staff team we have developed a long standing and strong awareness of reflective practice, true understanding began with our involvement in the Learning to Learn and be Active ‘Let’s Go’ projects. Reflective practice at Cranston Street Kindergarten occurs both formally (self review/staff meetings/individual programming etc.) and informally (incidental discussions) and addresses whole kindy issues through to an individual’s learning experience.

Professional knowledge of child development (particularly Piaget, Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner and Brain Theory) and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) inform curriculum decision making at Cranston Street Kindergarten. Children’s learning and development are observed, recorded and reflected upon in a cyclical pattern using the EYL framework as a documenting, planning and reflection tool. The program at Cranston Street Kindergarten is largely play based but staff also recognise that children benefit from planned small and large group experiences. As such group learning forms part of the daily routine ay Kindy and this maximises learning opportunities for all children. Each child and their family also experience individual child programming in their 1st and 3rd terms at Kindy. This process involves staff observations of children’s development, children’s interviews (about who they like to play with, what they like to play, what they would like to learn about or learn to do and what they don’t like at Kindy) and family knowledge about children. Where appropriate child care and family day care knowledge of children is also sought. (Children on special enrolment, children under the guardianship of the state and Aboriginal children also have negotiated curriculum plans or individual learning plans with curriculum goals in each area which are set in partnership with families and other services involved with the child’s development.) Staff collate observations of children’s interests, strengths, learning, and screenings for speech, language, phonological awareness and concept development. Families complete a questionnaire about their child’s interests, strengths, needs and experiences. All information is brought to the child’s program meeting held with families on Fridays (approx. 95% of families attend the meetings, those who do not attend meet with staff at another negotiated time). These meetings are seen as invaluable in building a rich understanding of children’s identities, their interests and needs and in building relationships with families. This partnership ensures positive learning outcomes for children.

Program activities developed at these meetings are strategically designed to support children’s development through their interests. For example, when a child expressed an interest in and broad knowledge about space but needed support to develop fine motor skills and an ability to listen to instructions then activities were designed around his interest which also fostered his developmental needs. His family also expressed their desire for him to become more engaged in creative activities.
Staff set-up a ‘Space’ play area where the child’s existing knowledge was honoured and he was introduced to new ideas and vocabulary through NASA digital media, displays, songs, role modelled play and resources. He made his own ‘Solar System’ poster which involved painting, labelling and following direction. Engaging him in this way not only built on his strengths but also enhanced his development and his programmed activities promoted the interest and learning of the broader Kindy community. Programmed activities may be individual, small or large group experiences and are frequently project or community based (i.e. excursions). The diversity of ideas and interests of our children ensure that the learning program is child focussed, diverse and highly engaging. Staff also follow incidental children’s interests, plan for general learning experiences (such as the protective behaviours program) and scaffold children’s play.

Children’s experiences and development are recorded by staff (through individual programs, photographs, anecdotes, work samples, screenings etc.) and are compiled in each child’s portfolio. Portfolios are the property of the child and their family and they are able to access them at any time, they are routinely sent home after program meetings to share with their family. Other avenues of reporting to families include incidental conversations, newsletters, displays and a summative statement is provided on the conclusion of their child’s Kindergarten experience.

Children are encouraged to make choices and decisions about what they learn and do at Cranston Street Kindergarten. A play curriculum naturally fosters these opportunities but children are also actively and routinely involved in making important decisions about matters which affect them, such as voting whether to wear hats outside all year or not and they brainstorm topics and vote to decide which story they want to have on the story table each term. Children frequently decide which books should be read and games played at mat time and they are encouraged to be active participants in selecting equipment and resources for their play. Children’s autonomy is also enhanced through them developing their own plans for coping with difficult situations, such as farewell plans for separating from their family. Children’s ideas, points of view and requests are highly valued by staff.

Children are supported to access the program and children who have additional needs are provided with integration support. The Cranston Street Kindy community also provides additional support to those children with mild and moderate speech and language concerns who would otherwise not receive support. Individual programming, small group learning experiences, rostered learning opportunities (such as greeting, roll call, sharing time, cooking etc.) ensure that no child is overlooked.

The current Kindy program is displayed on the front notice board and is updated weekly. The program includes information about individual children’s program activities, intended explicit teaching, weekly routines and rosters for program meetings and greeting and sharing times. Information about the program is also provided in the Kindy newsletter.

**KEY IMPROVEMENTS**

**ELEMENT 1.1.3/1.2.1**

During our research, in the Screening for Phonological Awareness project, Cranston Street Kindergarten staff became more aware of the need for children to develop key physical competencies before they are ready for formal learning at school. Although we have implemented a
daily physical program we are aware that we need further training and development in both assessing children’s physical development and teaching strategies for improving children’s skills in this area.

ELEMENT 1.1.4

Parents have indicated that they would appreciate more opportunities to discuss their child’s development with staff. Is this a valid expectation? Can we ‘do’ reporting smarter?

QUALITY AREA 2 – RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

STRENGTHS

Our Philosophy statement reflects the priority staff place on relationships with children. Sociocultural and Ecological Systems Theories inform us of the relational and cultural aspects of a child’s experience which influence their development. We understand that we both influence and are influenced by the interactions we have with children. We also acknowledge that the social relationships developed between children are critical to the development of each child. At Cranston Street Kindergarten we have a strong focus on respect and responsibility and the culture and practices at our site reflect this. For example, all children are greeted to Kindy each day by a child and a teacher, particular emphasis is placed on children understanding the explicit skills required to greet others with respect. Social interaction between children is enhanced by this practice, through an increased knowledge of other children’s names, their use of eye contact and a ‘friendly’ voice. Staff maintain responsive and caring relationships with all children and understand that talking with children has a huge impact on not only what we know about children but also children’s self identity and literacy development, so opportunities to interact with children are highly valued.

Staff foster positive relationships between children through collaborative learning projects and play. When staff work beside and with children and scaffold their play their relationships are strengthened and the outcomes for children’s learning are enriched. Individual programming also provides an opportunity for staff to work closely with children on projects which children initiated through their program interviews. Children also have opportunities to work with staff in small group learning experiences every day they attend Kindergarten. Children are divided into groups with peers who started Kindy at or near the same time. This allows children to build relationships with children who they will eventually transition to school with. Staff have the opportunity to work intensely with each group of children for at least one full term of their Kindy experience and therefore strengthen their relationships with them. Social skills are an important part of learning at Kindy. Staff model positive social behaviours and where ever possible social skills are explicitly discussed, frequently through story and play scenarios.
We use a problem solving approach to resolving social issues at our Kindy and staff expect children to be responsible for their actions and to make amends where appropriate. All children learn about John Joseph’s ‘Emotional Rooms’ in their first term at Kindy to support their understanding of their thinking and feelings. The language of the ‘Emotional Rooms’ is used when children are having difficulty managing their emotions, this may be when separating from their family, when children are anxious or frustrated or when they experience conflict with others. This model allows children to make sense of what is happening for them and when they have these understandings they have the power to shift their thinking and better manage their emotions. Children also learn about protective behaviours at Kindy, including early warning signs, how to say stop I don’t like …, and how and who to seek support from when they need it. We also teach children relaxation as part of the daily routine which helps them identify their relaxed state and how breathing can also support their management of emotion. Brain theory underpins the daily routines at Kindy and opportunities are provided for active learning, hydration and eating foods which stimulate positive chemicals in the brain. This ensures that children are able to think well and demonstrate thinking strategies which are dependent on optimal brain function.

At Cranston Street Kindergarten children are involved in developing many of the rules and routines, this ensures that children have ownership of them and are therefore more likely to respect and follow them. At Cranston Street Kindergarten we believe all behaviour is communication and as such staff work hard to understand what children are communicating and we work with families to resolve issues children may have which are impacting on their behaviour.

**KEY IMPROVEMENTS**

**ELEMENT 5.2.2**

Smooth transition to school is a focus of many of our practices at Kindy. For example, we use the language of school in our daily routines such as ‘recess’ rather than fruit or snack time. We have recently become aware of the ‘Restorative Practice’ program at the Port Lincoln Junior Primary School and are interested in how we may be able to integrate our problem solving approach with aspects of their program, particularly the visuals. If children are familiar with these processes when they begin school then their transition in this area will be seamless. We also need to research the practices used at both St. Josephs School and Navigator College so the children transitioning to these schools have an equal opportunity for smooth transition.