



Three Little Ships

International Preschool

Educational Policy

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Introduction

In September 2006, Lighthouse Special Education (hereafter LSE) founded the pre-school Three Little Ships (hereafter TLS).

Before September 2016, young children with special needs had applied to join the Lighthouse school, but could not be accommodated because they were under 4 years of age. In setting up TLS, the objective was to establish an inclusive group of children, where typically developing children and those with additional needs would learn together. In this inclusive setting, very young children with additional needs could be offered the best opportunities to learn from typically developing role models, and typically developing children could benefit from a structured and planned learning environment as well as learning to accept each other's differences. An initial positive experience of an inclusive playgroup had already taken place in 2005 in cooperation with 2Samen.

In establishing the TLS pre-school the following were considered:

- Children between 2½ and 4 years of age with learning and developmental challenges (such as Down Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, speech and language disorders, behavioural disorders, attention problems) were unable to join the Lighthouse school because they were too young. They were unable to join other mainstream international schools in The Hague because of the schools' lack of expertise or resources. The only alternative for these children was placement in a Dutch special needs day care facility. However, the families were generally temporarily in The Netherlands and the Dutch language was inappropriate to the children. Many of these children ended up staying at home without any form of assistance or education.
- There was a high demand for English preschool places for typically developing children from 3 ½ to 5 years of age as, at the time, the international schools in The Hague were not offering school places to children before the September of the year in which they reached the age of 4.
- Early intervention is essential for the learning and development of children with additional needs.
- The curriculum would be topic-based and would be based on best international practice for preschool classes. In addition to this curriculum, the children with additional needs would each have their own Individual Education Plan (IEP) which would address their individual learning needs.
- Parents who were consulted were positive about the formation of an inclusive preschool group.

Three Little Ships differs from other pre-schools in a number of ways:

- All the children attend the pre-school for 4½ school days a week.
- Almost all the children attend the school for one year before transferring to other international primary schools. Consequently the composition of the group remains fairly stable throughout the year.
- English is the medium of instruction in the preschool class.
- The maximum size of the class is 16 children and typically includes 5 children with additional needs.
- The ratio of classroom staff to children is high with a minimum of 3 adults to 16 children. Dutch law specifies 2 adults per group of 16 children.

Mission Statement of HSV

The TLS preschool belongs to the family of Haagsche School Vereeniging. The mission statement of the HSV is: 'Global citizenship, lifelong learning'.

Mission of TLS

The mission of TLS is to offer international expatriate children, both with and without additional needs, an optimal inclusive learning environment where the children can develop and learn together.

Vision Statement

Three Little Ships provides a positive and secure learning environment for all children, underpinned by structured teaching and successful communication. Within the learning environment, we accept and respect all children the way they are, recognising each person as unique. Opportunities for play, creativity and positive experiences are fundamental to the TLS curriculum. TLS believes strongly in the importance of trust, tolerance, acceptance dialogue, individual attention, support, challenge and encouragement.

Educational Objectives

The Dutch law on pre-school education (Wet Kinderopvang) states: “Responsible preschool education contributes to a good and healthy development of the child in a safe environment”. The law specifies four development objectives which are based on research of Mrs. M. Riksen-Walraven¹.

1. Providing a feeling of emotional security.
2. Stimulating personal competencies.
3. Stimulating social competencies.
4. Socialisation: offering (cultural) rules, norms and values.

The way in which TLS pursues the educational objectives is set out below.

1. Providing a feeling of emotional security

Having emotional security is one of the basic human needs of any child. It is even more important for children who move on a regular basis because of the expatriate lives of their parents.

In TLS a feeling of security is created by and maintained through:

- A consistent team of teaching assistants. All the staff are qualified to work with typically developing children in day care settings and all staff also have experience of working with children with additional needs. Many staff also have extra qualifications in working with children with additional needs.
- A stable group of children of more or less the same age that generally remains the same throughout the school year.
- An identified place for each child in the group. This is reinforced by children having their own labelled place to hang their coat, their own box for storing their belongings and so on.
- A well-organised classroom with various areas designated for specific activities.
- A schedule for the day so that the children know what will happen during the day and in what sequence. The schedule is reinforced with the use of consistent picture symbols.
- Clear rules on how to interact with each other and with the environment. Some of these rules are emphasised by the use of songs e.g. The Tidy up Time Song. Others are emphasised through using the materials of PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) of which the core values are: “*Be respectful, be safe, be responsible*”.
- A strong link between the preschool and the parents. Parents are welcomed into the building to drop-off and collect their children. One teaching assistant welcomes the children as they arrive with their parents. Parents are encouraged to share information about special events that happen at home. Teaching assistants verbally share important information about events during the school day as parents collect their children. Sometimes a notebook is used to share information with parents. For the children with additional needs, the notebook may be used on almost every day. If parents or staff have a more serious concern about a child then an appointment is made to discuss this sensitively, without the child being present. A weekly newsletter is emailed to parents with photos of classroom activities. Classroom activities are shared

¹ Riksen-Walraven, M. (2004). ‘Pedagogische Kwaliteit in de kinderopvang: doelstellingen en kwaliteitscriteria’. In: IJzendoorn, R. van, Tavecchio, L., Riksen-Walraven, M., *De Kwaliteit van de Nederlandse Kinderopvang* (pp 100-124). Amsterdam: Boom.

through the week on Twitter. A school newsletter is periodically sent by the Director to all parents. Parents' evenings are held twice a year to update parents on their children's progress. Open mornings are held three times a year for parents to learn more about the educational programme and the materials used in the classroom. Before children start at the preschool, the parents are invited to an induction morning when they are given information about the preschool and they can visit the classroom with their child. At the end of the school year, or when children leave the preschool, a written report of their learning is given to parents.

2. Stimulating personal competencies

The development of personal competencies such as resilience, independence, self-confidence, flexibility and creativity enables children to cope with all sorts of challenges and adapt successfully to changing circumstances. Children develop these competencies through playing and investigating their environment.

In TLS personal competencies are stimulated by:

- The organisation of the classroom and outside learning space which combines structured activities (such as table-top activities and riding bicycles) and open-ended play opportunities (such as building activities and sand play).
- The educational materials that are available in the preschool which are appropriate to the age and developmental level of the children. Technology such as iPads, computers and a Smart board are used to enhance children's learning.
- The teaching assistants who are skilled in encouraging and developing children's play and investigation skills. The children are given the time and space to initiate and develop their activities, while being supported by the teaching assistants to challenge themselves to develop their ideas further.
- Flexible groupings so that children can choose familiar peers to play and to investigate with but are also encouraged to build new relationships.
- A safe and supportive environment in which children are given opportunities to resolve challenges on their own or with others. It is through having opportunities to win and lose, to problem-solve in difficult situations, to explore and expand boundaries, to challenge themselves to try new things, that children learn what they can do and who they are.
- Teaching assistants pay attention to what the children are able to do independently and stimulate further independence in a phased and supportive manner. The self-help skills of eating and drinking and personal hygiene are practised daily. Children are encouraged to be as independent as possible and are facilitated as necessary.
- The development of children's self-confidence through verbal praise and reward systems. Every child is encouraged to be proud of his/her own achievements, including small steps such as fastening up a coat, finishing a meal, completing a puzzle or building a tower.
- The teaching assistants offer a great variety of activities and opportunities to play in different situations, such as 1:1 with an adult, in pairs, in small groups and with the whole class. Group games, fantasy games, drama and imitation all provide excellent opportunities for children to develop their personal competencies.
- The development of the personal competencies of the children with additional needs may be at a different pace to that of their typically developing peers and may be limited by their personal challenges. The Individual Educational Plan (IEP) defines personal goals for these children and the teaching assistants ensure that activities are made appropriately accessible to the children with special needs.

- Curriculum planning based on the expectations of the local international schools into which most children will transition. Six different areas of focus are distinguished in the curriculum and are described in more detail below.

3. Stimulating social competencies

Social competencies include the ability to consider another person's point of view, to communicate, to co-operate, to assist others, to prevent and solve conflicts and the development of social responsibility. Being part of a group and having opportunities for interacting with peers are important in the development of social competencies. Social competencies are also developed by working co-operatively with others, by waiting for a turn in a game, by helping others, by showing good sportsmanship when winning or losing and by resolving conflict successfully.

The Three Little Ships pre-school offers many opportunities for social interactions in many different ways:

- The teaching assistants provide activities in flexible groupings. Sometimes the groups are selected by the teaching assistants and sometimes the children choose their own groups.
- Children play in large and in small groups; in groups with peers; in groups with younger or older children. There is a daily outside playtime and older children from the Lighthouse school class may join in with this. Occasionally there may also be a special activity with the children from the Reception class of the international school next door.
- The presence of children with additional needs in the same pre-school class offers a unique possibility to learn skills for helping each other. Together, children learn not to be scared of differences and they develop an understanding of their personal responsibility to take care of others.
- The children have the opportunity to see themselves as part of a larger group through whole class routines such as the circle time at the beginning of each day, jointly having lunch, welcoming new children into the group and saying goodbye to departing children.
- The teaching assistants stimulate positive interactions between the children, supporting them when necessary. Children are encouraged to resolve their conflicts, with support if necessary and are given help in preventing conflict from reoccurring.
- The teaching assistants model positive interactions between themselves, providing a good example for children to copy.

4. Socialisation: offering (cultural) rules, norms and values

Joining the Three Little Ships preschool may give children the first opportunity to meet children from different family backgrounds. Parents of children in the preschool have many different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. They may also have different values (beliefs) and norms (behaviours) from each other and may have different ideas about upbringing.

The school is based on Western European norms of upbringing and education. The children are taught that the preschool has its own rules, which may sometimes be different from those at home. The preschool aims to prepare the children to take their place in an international school community. The preschool also plays a role in informing the parents about international school expectations, creating a bridge between home and (future) school.

The following values (beliefs) and norms (behaviours) and are important for the pre-school and are taught to the children:

- Respect: allowing others to be different and celebrating differences.
- Equality: treating everyone fairly and ensuring they can participate fully.

- Solidarity: listening to each other, showing interest and appreciation of others.
- Honesty: being loyal and fair without deceit.
- Justice: resolving conflicts and making amends when things go wrong.
- Consideration: not hurting each other or endangering another.
- Environmental respect: looking after the classroom and its equipment.

Teaching assistants have an important role in creating a classroom atmosphere where these norms and values are put in practice. Through watching the behaviour of the teaching assistants, the children learn positive, friendly and open ways of engaging with each other.

Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with in an age-appropriate way. Simple language is used to explain why the behaviour is inappropriate. The child may be offered a short time in a quiet place to calm down and reflect on his/her behaviour. For children who demonstrate particularly difficult behaviour, a behaviour plan may be drawn up with the parents and consistently carried out by all adults in the child's life.

The Curriculum

Six different areas of focus are distinguished in the curriculum. These areas are not presented individually but are woven into monthly topics and themes. The topics are planned for the year, ensuring that the curriculum is balanced. The weekly planning meetings of the teaching assistants ensures that children's individual needs are responded to and that adaptations to the planning can be made effectively and efficiently.

1. Communication, language and literacy

The children in the preschool speak a variety of languages at home. It is important for the children to learn to understand and speak English, as they are most likely to continue their education in English-medium international schools. Language learning is a fundamental part of the curriculum for all the children.

- Spoken language: new vocabulary is taught in a structured way, using visual materials, props and story books. Common phrases are modelled frequently by the teaching assistants for children to imitate.
- The topics provide the children with exposure to new and exciting language that they can use to express their learning. They enable children to develop their skills of recounting events, retelling stories and predicting the future.
- An awareness of written language is developed through the children seeing words around the classroom (names on the door, signage) and sharing story books. Pre-writing skills are encouraged and developed including pencil control and early mark making. Where children show an interest in letters, they are encouraged to explore these through a variety of age-appropriate materials.
- The preschool has a well-stocked library and books can be borrowed by parents to read with their children at home.
- For the typically developing children, the goal is for them to be able to communicate in English at the level required for entry to primary school.
- For the children with additional needs, the goal is for them to develop their language and communication skills as successfully as possible. For some children, this may mean learning to use alternative communication strategies such as sign language (MAKATON) or pictograms (PECS).

2. Social and emotional development

This has been described in more detail in the section 'Educational objectives: Stimulating social competencies.'

3. Physical and sensory development

Physical and sensory development skills include both gross and fine motor skills, and the development of the senses: feeling, smelling, tasting, hearing and seeing. It is important that children have opportunities to play outside in a playground and inside in a gym to learn, develop and practise these skills.

- Gross motor skills include walking, running, climbing, throwing balls, kicking balls. Using themed games, the children are stimulated to move in a variety of ways, for example "Animal walks". A variety of bicycles are provided outside. The gym is equipped with climbing frames, a swing and a ballbox which allow the children to explore different movements.
- Fine motor skills include drawing, colouring, modelling, making puzzles, building, and cutting. Art and craft activities are chosen to practise a variety of these skills, while supporting the themes of the curriculum.

- Sensory development includes developing an awareness of different sounds, tastes and feelings through exploring different media and materials.

4. Creative development and fantasy

The creative development, expression and fantasy of the child is more important in the TLS curriculum than the end result. The creative expression of the children often reflects the topics that are taught in school, as they explore new ideas, practise vocabulary and reinforce their own learning. Creative development is encouraged in a number of different ways:

- Drama which includes fantasy games, role play, dressing up and acting. The role play area in the classroom is linked to the monthly topic.
- Art and craft activities which include drawing, painting, modelling and building. A wide range of materials are provided, which offer children open-ended opportunities for creative development and fantasy. These include home materials (packing materials and boxes), natural materials (leaves and shells,) and construction material (building blocks and Lego).

5. Mathematical development

Mathematical skills and language are fundamental to problem-solving and critical thinking. Mathematical concepts are taught as part of the routines of the day (when talking about the date and the weather) and in the topic activities. The children are stimulated to use mathematics in their own chosen play activities, for example when playing in the house corner, counting how many plates and cups they need to lay the table for everyone. Mathematical skills include:

- A sense of number. Activities are provided so that children can learn to count by rote, to recognise numerals 0-9 and beyond, to learn the names of the numerals, to match the numerals to groups of objects and to sort the numerals into numerical order on a number line.
- Mathematical language. Through the topics and the classroom activities, children are exposed to mathematical vocabulary such as 'more' and 'less'; 'big' and 'small'. They also learn concepts that describe relative positions such as 'beside', 'in front', 'under'.
- Shape. The children develop the ability to recognise different shapes in their environment and to understand the properties of these shapes through exploration and through art and craft activities.

6. Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children are naturally curious about themselves and their world. The children in TLS come from many different countries and cultures and this gives the pre-school exciting learning opportunities for children to develop an interest in the lives of others and to develop understanding and tolerance. This curriculum area is taught in the following ways:

- The topics that are selected reflect different aspects of understanding the world and have historical, geographical and scientific themes.
- Important events in the families of other children are discussed in the pre-school in an age-appropriate way and may be in small groups or with the whole class. Children are encouraged to talk and role-play any worries they may have about changes in their family such as a parental business trip, a new baby or moving house.
- Religious celebrations are explained from the children's own experiences. This may include Christmas, Divali, Ramadan and Passover.

- A daily circle time offers an opportunity to introduce new themes and vocabulary to help in developing an understanding of the world. During circle time many different subjects will be discussed, which enables the children to get to know and understand the world around them.
- Activities that allow for the exploration of the world, both inside and outside the classroom are planned with care. The children participate in some off-site trips throughout the year that reinforce the learning in the pre-school class.

Additional Needs

The Three Little Ships has a lot of in-house expertise regarding the development and behaviour of children; many of the staff are trained and/or experienced in working with children with additional (learning) needs. If there are concerns about a child's development or if a learning disorder is suspected, then the child can generally stay in the Three Little Ships preschool while assessment and initial therapy takes place.

Assessment

The parents will be advised by the staff about any concerns regarding their child. They will be put in touch with the therapists who work in the school who are able to carry out observations and assessments. There is a child psychologist attached to the school who can also be consulted.

Planning for Additional Needs

The preschool's multi-disciplinary team meets with the parents and, under the direction of the Pupil Monitoring Co-ordinator (Intern Begeleider), draws up an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The goals of the therapists who are involved with the child are included in this plan and staff are advised as to how they can support the work of the therapist. IEPs are evaluated and updated twice a year.

Other (daycare) organisations also refer children to our school, particularly if the children are from international families or are staying temporarily in The Netherlands.

Sometimes parents are referred to other organisations for specialist assessment or for support in the home, such as the Centrum voor Autisme, Kentalis, Banjaard, ABA centrum in Woerden and ABA Instituut in Waalwijk.

Future Schooling

The Pupil Monitoring Co-ordinator discusses children's needs in a regular Care Committee meeting with the Dutch Education Authority (SPPOH) so that parents can be advised in a timely way about suitable school placements for their child with additional needs.

Where necessary, a Toelatingsverklaring (TLV) is requested to enable the child to proceed to the Lighthouse Special Education school or a Dutch Special Education School.

Staffing

Quality

The TLS team is led by a Director of TLS and Lighthouse Special Education and is a qualified teacher. The Director is responsible for recruiting and supporting quality teaching assistants. The Director is also responsible for leading the educational programme of the preschool.

The quality of the teaching assistants is clearly of the utmost importance in achieving the four educational goals and in the delivery of the curriculum. The teaching assistants are expected to adhere to and be able to demonstrate the values and norms described in 'Educational Objectives: Socialisation: offering (cultural) rules, norms and values'. Teaching Assistants sign a school Code of Conduct at the start of their employment and resign after any updates to this Code. They are also expected to have a thorough understanding of typical developmental milestones for 2-5 year olds.

In addition, the teaching assistants are expected to have the following qualities:

- Positive attitude towards the children.
- Sensitivity and responsiveness to the children's needs.
- An openness to new ideas and a willingness to change.
- Respect for different cultures and views of children, parents and staff members.
- Flexibility and creativity: seeing learning opportunities and seizing them.

Skills

The teaching assistants are qualified to work with young children, according to Dutch qualification standards, and have specific experience or qualifications relating to children with additional needs.

In addition, teaching assistants are expected to demonstrate the following important skills:

- Ability to create a stimulating environment in which young children can learn successfully.
- Ability to modify their language when talking to children so that they are understood.
- Ability to see learning opportunities and act on them.
- Ability to be a role model for the children in the interactions with the children, parents and other staff members.
- Ability to contribute to curriculum planning and to break tasks into simple steps.
- Ability to reflect professionally on their work and accept feedback from others.
- Good verbal and non-verbal interpersonal skills and good written skills in English.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality with parents and in the team.
- Ability to work successfully in a team with colleagues and with external professionals.

Support

External professionals such as a psychologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist and speech therapist work with the children with additional needs during the preschool day. The teaching assistants work under the guidance of these professionals and the children's goals are set jointly with them.

Every year, teaching assistants are offered continued education in the form of (at least) two in-house study days per year. The topics of the study days are varied and may focus on curriculum development (such as communication), health and safety issues (such as first aid) or special needs (such as sign language).

Teaching assistants are also given opportunities to attend local international study days and take part in the local International Early Years forum.

Teaching assistants have Personal Professional Conversations with the Director on a biennial basis. Targets for professional development are set at these meetings. Teaching Assistants are observed in their professional work by the TLS Team Leader and by the Director and given feedback on their work. Areas for development are discussed.

The teaching assistants work on set days and there are approved substitute assistants to cover the illness of a team member, providing continuity as far as possible.

Child Protection Policy

Haagsche Schoolvereniging

The HSV schools have a child protection policy and this can be made available to parents on request.

Three Little Ships

In addition, the Three Little Ships has additional child safety procedures in place. These include:

- All staff who have contact with the children in the preschool have had a criminal record check (VOG) by the Dutch authorities. This also includes substitute staff, lunchtime supervisors, therapists, volunteers and students on work placement.
- During the recruitment of staff, references are taken and previous employers are asked about any disciplinary or criminal proceedings in regard to that staff member.
- Staff receive training about child abuse and how to act if they have concerns about a child.
- Two staff are always in the classroom with the children. Staff breaks are organised so that no-one is left alone with a group of children. Lunchtime supervisors help in the classroom at lunchtime to keep up the staff:child ratio.
- All areas of the school, including the toilet area are open and visible to other adults.
- There are no areas of the school that the children go to that do not have windows.
- Windows in the school are never completely covered by art work or paintings.
- Children are assisted in the toilet by an adult who is always in the sight or hearing distance of another member of staff. There is also an Intimate Care Policy that teaching assistants adhere to.

Members of staff or parents who have any concerns about child protection issues are urged to speak to the Director. The school also has a confidential Contact Person that parents can speak to for advice. The Contact Person's details are communicated to the parents through newsletters and the website.

Parents who have a complaint can request a copy of the complaint procedure from the confidential contact person or from the TLS Director.