

## Inspiring inquisitiveness and imagination

Seemingly overnight babies develop into little people, verbalising and becoming even more aware of their ever-expanding world. Learning, Nicky Callow says, changes constantly, assessed by her team of observers. “They are like engineers with their necessity to learn, have the intention to solve a problem, and they’ll learn. What we do is to support their learning.”

The school runs age-specific programmes for about 60 three- to four-year-old children in a purpose-designed building, which Callow says, makes it a happy place.

Early learning programs and methods are refined by researchers in education and parents’ expectations. Callow says that the school’s philosophy is that children learn best in early learning environments that are playful and fun. “Children learn best when they are engaged and their learning is interrupted. You can allow them time to explore, investigate, scaffold their learning and build on their play, which gives them the opportunity to build their relationships.”

At Yarra Park, learning is based on the children’s interests and needs, but “our program is based on the collective group needs first,” says Callow. “Each child has their own learning plan that is based on our observations and conversations with parents. Every day we set up learning experiences and the children’s goals are incorporated into that plan. Staff are aware of what needs to be done and our children know where to go and how to get there. We have their ‘red dot’ to sign in and then in the afternoon we sit at the table and discuss their learning plans, as each activity is modified accordingly.”

While some focus is given to literacy and numeracy, an important aim is to ensure children feel safe and comfortable when they move into prep. “They need to have the confidence to speak to a teacher to have their needs met, and to know how to interact with other children. They should also know how to sit and listen.”

Melbourne’s leafy outer-areas, it is said, is the school’s focus, with an emphasis on outdoor learning at all year levels, and the ELC employ a trained early learning teacher whose

