



## THE WILLOWS PHILOSOPHY

*Growing Together, A Great Head Start*

The Willows fosters a culture of RESPECT for all.

### R Rights

**The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.**

This belief underpins all that we do at the Willows. We view children as capable individuals with rights, who are worthy of respect and consultation.

### E Equal But Different

We believe all people deserve equal opportunities and respect. At the same time, we acknowledge that their differences and unique contexts must be recognised and celebrated.

**We foster an environment of inclusion and joy for diversity.**

### S Strong Relationships

We believe it is vital to foster strong relationships among children, families, educators, and the community. All that we do:

- Relies on strong relationships
- Is in the interest of building, strengthening and maintaining relationships
- Is enriched by collaborative and respectful relationships

### P Play

**Playing to Learn, Learning to Play**

We are passionate about children's right to play and its vital role in children's learning, development and wellbeing. We facilitate calculated risk-taking in play, offering thrilling opportunities for challenge, testing limits, and exploring boundaries. We support play that is child-initiated and child-led. At the Willows, we promote, engage in, and prioritise children's play in order to support children to grow into life-long lovers of learning.

### E Earth

We strive to connect children to the Earth in meaningful ways, to foster a love and joy for our natural world, to ensure children reap life-long benefits of the great outdoors, and to nurture the development of sustainability-minded individuals.

**Willows children jump in puddles, roll down hills, stop and smell the flowers, care for living creatures and dance in the rain...**

### C Community

**Promoting a sense of community.**

We believe it is important to support children to become community-minded citizens both locally and globally, and to become individuals who care about, contribute to and lead positive change in their world.

### T Treasuring Childhood

**Respecting and Celebrating Childhood**

We believe childhood is an incredibly precious and influential time in a person's life; it should be respected, celebrated and protected. We encourage children to savour this stage in life and to engage and revel in all that is unique to childhood. We also strive to preserve the amazing gifts of childhood so that our children can grow into adults who maintain their sense of awe and wonder, curiosity, creativity, and enthusiasm for life.



## WHAT WE BELIEVE...

### About Children

#### *The Willows Image of the Child*

We believe, from their moment of birth, each child is a strong, capable, creative, competent human being with all the skills and resources needed to fulfill their innate desire to make sense of the world around them.

We believe children have rights that should be respected and advocated, and that their voice must be heard and valued. The Willows recognizes children as unique individuals on their own journey, with their own past, and their own agenda.

We believe children are social learners who discover their world through hands on, child-led play supported and facilitated by warm and responsive educators.

We hold high expectations for children's achievement in learning and develop a responsive and inclusive curriculum to support the success of each child in their own time, on their own terms.

It is this image of the child that guides all that we do at the Willows.

#### *Children's Rights*

We acknowledge and advocate children's rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Every child deserves the best. Children have a right to:

1. Have their physical and emotional needs met,
2. Be safe and protected,
3. An amazing childhood and to simply be a child,
4. To have a care and educational curriculum developed around their individual needs, considering their interests, abilities, culture and personal context,
5. Be consulted and actively involved in their own experience.

All children have these rights regardless of circumstance and should be supported to exercise them.

#### *Our Vision for Future Generations*

We respect children's right to be, to revel in the here-and-now and to experience all that it is to be a child. We also recognize our responsibility to support who they are becoming.

It is our hope that we can nurture the development of individuals who:

1. Have a strong sense of identity. Individuals who truly know and love who they are. Who are not afraid of trial and error, are excited by challenge, are intrinsically motivated, and have a deep sense of responsibility, agency and autonomy.
2. Are socially competent, empathetic, advocates for equality and inclusion. Who have a joy for diversity and who question bias and unfairness.
3. Are environmentally-aware, sustainability-minded, eco-warriors.
4. Are healthy, strong, and resilient. Who make positive and informed lifestyle choices and have physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.
5. Are seekers and sharers of knowledge, have a strong sense of awe and wonder and a deep love of learning. Individuals who understand how they think and learn.
6. Are articulate. Competent and confident verbal and non-verbal communicators and interpreters.
7. Are technologically competent and able to thrive in a world of constant technological advancement.
8. Are curious innovators, creators, questioners, thinkers, world-changers (whether that be in their direct groups and communities or on a global stage).



## About Families

*At the Willows Families are:*

### Respected

At the Willows we celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of our families, and actively seek to learn about and acknowledge their varied perspectives, values, cultures, communication and parenting styles, and all that makes each family special.

We respect each family's right to privacy and ensure that confidentiality and dignity are maintained at all times.

### Consulted/Partners

We believe that families are the leading experts on their children. It is therefore vital to maintain strong, collaborative relationships with families in order to provide the best possible care and education for their children.

At the Willows, we work in close partnership with families to ensure all areas of the service reflect the needs and values of all stakeholders. Families play a pivotal role in discussions and decision-making regarding the service philosophy, policies, procedures, and curriculum practice. Families are also invited to support us in our commitment to continuous improvement by helping to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

We share our passion, discoveries, achievements, philosophy and mission with families, and invite them to join us on the Willows journey.

### Welcomed

Families are allowing us to share in something most precious – witnessing their children grow and develop, and discover who they are to become.

Families are supported to be active members of the Willows community and are whole-heartedly welcomed into the service to get involved and engaged. They are invited to participate in ways that are meaningful to them, and to share their strengths, passions and talents to enrich our service.

We endeavour to support families to become part of a greater Willows family, to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, and to feel at home as they allow us to share in their child's journey.

### Supported

We strive to empower families to:

- Know and practise their rights,
- Be informed and have access to the latest parenting information and research,
- Seek and receive the support they need,
- To connect to and participate in our community, and
- Have the experience they wish for their children.

We are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of children and families and work together in respectful ways to support families and children in any way that we can.



## About Educators and Staff

*The Willows Educators are:*

### Diverse

Every Willows educator is celebrated and supported to share their culture, passions, talents, experience, knowledge, values, opinions and beliefs. Each educator has an ever-evolving personal philosophy of Early Childhood care and education based on their personal and professional history, engagement with theoretical perspectives, and their beliefs about childhood, children, learning and curriculum.

### Unified

As diverse as we are, we are driven by a clear, shared vision that underpins all practices at the service. We support each other to be the best educators we can be and acknowledge each other's gifts, experience and diversity. We work to our strengths to enrich the service. Each one of us plays a vital and active role in the service, contributing to decision-making at all levels.

The personality of the Willows is a culmination of the individual values and beliefs of all educators.

## Passionate Professionals, Mentors & Advocates

Willows educators are qualified, experienced **professionals** who play a significant role in nurturing the minds bodies and spirits of the next generation through documenting, assessing and supporting individual learning and development.



We are passionate, dedicated, innovative, energetic, involved, fearless, reflective, intentional, and driven, boundary-pushers and critical reflectors, who are not afraid to ask big, important questions that challenge our beliefs and practice, and always strive to improve and build on our knowledge and skills.

Willows educators maintain relationships based on trust, honesty, respect and confidentiality with families, children and each other.

Willows educators are **mentors** to students, volunteers and families.

We **advocate** for the rights of children and families, and the profession of early childhood care and education and its vital role in our community.

## Reflective, Informed & Committed To Continuous Improvement

All staff members keep up-to-date with latest research and early childhood theories to ensure best practice and outcomes are achieved for all children.

We foster and engage in a culture of critical reflection and continuous improvement to build upon our knowledge and analyse our practice and beliefs.

We consider ourselves to be co-learners alongside children, families and the community.



## About the Curriculum

### *The Importance of Quality Care and Education in the Early Years*

With 90% of brain development occurring by age 5, the early years are an exciting and crucial time in our lives, particularly for instilling and solidifying positive attitudes, attributes, values and life skills. Children's brains are being shaped in unique ways through their experiences, relationships and opportunities.

The first five years of life are critical in setting patterns for life success. At the Willows, we are committed to giving children the very best start in order for them to live fulfilling and successful lives.

We view children as whole individuals, sharing a precious stage in their lives with us.

We support them towards success at big school and beyond - we provide life-readiness, not just school-readiness. Luckily, current research shows that the very dispositions associated with life success have been identified as predictors of success at school too! (Please see *The Willows School Readiness Document*.)

### *The Willows is a place to:*

- Discover yourself,
- Uncover and hone your emerging talents and passions,
- Develop and test your theories,
- Grow strong in emotional and social intelligence,
- Develop open hearts and minds and
- Master the skills that truly matter for life success such as:
  - i. Creativity, resilience, persistence, flexibility, and facing challenges enthusiastically,
  - ii. Knowing how to nurture relationships,
  - iii. A love of learning, curiosity and sense of awe and wonder for our incredible world,
  - iv. A joy for diversity, humanity and nature, and
  - v. Knowing who we are, how we can be our best selves and how we can look after ourselves.



The Willows offers these opportunities through an unpressured, unhurried, holistic and individualised curriculum based on a deep knowledge of each child and family, current early childhood theories, research and information, and, most importantly, through strong supportive relationships.

### *We believe the best curriculum acknowledges that:*

Children learn best when engaged in hands on, meaningful, authentic experiences based on their strength and interests, when they are given autonomy, and allowed to lead their own learning.

Children need to be given time to engage in deep learning, facilitated by caring and skilled and knowledgeable adults, who recognise when they can value-add and when they should stand back and allow children to discover for themselves,

It is our responsibility to know our children very well, know about play and development, and listen to what children say, acknowledge their thinking, and facilitate their play.

### *Belonging Being and Becoming at the Willows*

## **BECOMING THROUGH BEING. BEING AS A RESULT OF BELONGING.**

At the Willows, first, we foster a sense of belonging (relationships) which leads to us feeling confident and secure enough to be – exploring who we are, our thoughts and theories, our world, our place, our purpose. It is through being that we become; shaping our minds and bodies.

As outlined in our curriculum framework, the Early Years Learning Framework, the Willows works to support the whole child by nurturing their sense of belonging, protecting their right to be, and facilitating the individual they are becoming.



# THE WILLOWS

## PRESCHOOL & EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

### *The Willows Curriculum:*

**Is Holistic.** The Willows Curriculum is holistic because we acknowledge that children's learning is holistic. Children learn simultaneously in all areas: emotional, social, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical. Our curriculum encompasses ALL THAT WE DO at the Willows, including all environments (not just the classrooms), routines, interactions, experiences and resources.

**Is based on a cycle of planning,** informed by critical reflection and professional knowledge.

**Is Informed by children's interests** and personalised to cater to the individual children in care.

**Is guided by our image of the child** as competent, capable, worthy of respect and with the right to be actively involved in their experiences (agency and autonomy).

**Values Process not product,** this is where the learning and sense of wellbeing develops.

**Honours Play as children's work,** every child has a right to engage in Playwork. As latest neuro-scientific research supports, we believe the very best context for children's learning is PLAY.

**Is Challenging,** introducing risky play, to build confidence and resilience.

**Is Rich,** ever-changing, thoughtful, thought provoking.

**Is Authentic,** with real resources and experiences that are contextually relevant.

**Is Based around open-ended resources, and loose parts** that come to life in the hands of children.

**Encourages Creativity** with ample time to experience deeply

**Instills a sense of responsibility, agency and autonomy** by inviting children to be active community members - taking responsibility for ourselves, our belongings, each other and our world.

**Can be Messy** with mud and goop and slime

**Is Emergent** with spontaneous and planned experiences guided by children and based in reflective practice.

**Focuses on Natural** emphasising nature and our connection to the earth.

**Encompasses sustainability** and protecting our grandchildren's heritage.

**Is Collaborative,** consulting all stakeholders.

**Is constantly evolving,** to suit the needs of all stakeholders and to ensure best practice.



**LEARNING TO LEARN**  
We teach your child HOW to think  
not what to think.



## About Environments

*The Willows Environments are:*

### Viewed as a Third Teacher

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia principal of the Environment as the third teacher, the Willows recognises learning environments' potential to inspire children and support deep learning. At the Willows, we design learning environments, provocations and invitations for children to explore and extend their learning and interests, and to facilitate deep, child-initiated, child-directed play.

We acknowledge that the environment communicates in unique ways to children and we use that knowledge to:

- Ensure that our resources, furniture, layout, mood etc. all communicate to children that this is their space, that they can use it freely and truly belong.
- Communicate the importance of respecting and taking responsibility for our environments.

### Thoughtfully Planned and Resourced

We plan to create environments that reflect and enrich the lives and identities of the children, families and educators at the service, and celebrate and represent all members of our community.

Through the provision of a rich environment that is carefully planned and resourced, we can offer opportunities to extend children's learning, provoke critical thinking and questioning, provide novelty and wonder, encourage communication and exploration, and enrich play experiences.

Through critical reflection, we plan for our environments to evolve and grow in order to encourage children to delve deeper into their interests.

We respect children as capable by providing them with authentic materials, tools, experiences and spaces.

Our learning environments encompass all the senses, and are careful not to over-stimulate. Our educators allow sufficient time for children to fully engage in learning environments and offer gentle and considered guidance to maximize learning potential.

### Homelike

We believe a warm, inviting, home-like environment is most conducive to learning, development and relationships. We strive to create welcoming spaces that offer sufficient consistency and predictability while remaining vibrant, and flexible.

### Natural

At the Willows we value the great outdoors and all its amazing benefits. It is our wish to give children the opportunity to revel in all that the natural world has to offer and to support them to develop a deep desire to live healthy and sustainable lives.

We hope to create a connection between our indoor and outdoor environments and allow free access to both in order to cater to individual preferences. Some people learn through movement. Just watch all the disputes evaporate when we get everyone out into the paddock!

As a service we are devoted to ensuring our policies, practices, resources and curriculum reflect our commitment to sustainable practices and protecting our children's future.

"THE BEST  
THING AT THE  
WILLOWS IS LOOKING  
AFTER HOWIE  
(THE BUNNY)."

Indie  
(4 years)



# THE WILLOWS

## PRESCHOOL & EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

### Safe But with Plenty of Opportunities for Risky Play

We honour our commitment to provide environments of physical and emotional safety, it is only through this sense of security that children are ready to learn and engage.

We offer a safe environment for children to take appropriate physical, emotional and intellectual risks - to test their limits, confidently overcome challenges, and reach their potential.

As research shows, this will support them to manage their own risks and develop resilience, self-reliance, adventurousness, entrepreneurialism, the ability to face life's challenges openly, and a healthy attitude to failure.

### Social and Supportive of Relationships

We develop environments that promote engagement and collaboration, and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. We endeavour to foster a sense of belonging and unity.

### Inclusive

We are dedicated to creating environments for all learners that are responsive to interests, abilities and needs of children, families, educators and the community.

We strive to provide environments that accommodate and reflect:

- Different preferences and learning styles, providing places to be active, to explore, to challenge yourself, to work as a team and places to relax, to reflect, to refresh, to gather your thoughts, to be by yourself or just with your very closest friend.
- All abilities, and
- The culture and identities of all members.

## About Our Community

### *Our Commitment to Indigenous Australians*

We acknowledge and value our nations first people and are proud to come from a country that is home to one of the world's oldest known cultures.

We are committed to building an understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and contemporary perspectives, and strive to embed it into our curriculum and everyday practices in meaningful ways so that we can move to a place of equity, justice and partnership.

We are also dedicated to continually reflecting upon our practices to ensure that our service meets the varied care needs of our Indigenous children and families.

### *We Recognise Our Unique Setting*

It is our goal to provide the best possible service. In order to do this, the Willows must reflect and cater to the culture and evolving needs of our community.

We draw on our community to provide an authentic curriculum and a meaningful service.

### *Supporting and Connecting With our Community*

We endeavour to be an information hub and a resource for information and support for families and the community.

We strive to connect and contribute to our community.

We must nurture meaningful relationships with community services and individuals.

We invite the community in to share their expertise and knowledge to support families and the curriculum.

### *Global Citizens*

We support children to develop into active and engaged community members and support them to recognise themselves as global citizens with shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity.