

USING BALANCEABILITY TO SUPPORT EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT

Nikki Riches and Samantha Wright

WHAT IS BALANCEABILITY?

Balanceability is an Association for Physical Education (afPE) approved learn to cycle programme for children aged 2½ years upwards. The programme is designed to help children gain the confidence and skills required to ride a pedal bike independently, getting them off to the best start in cycling and assisting their ability to participate in Bikeability at a later stage. For children, schools provide the most accessible, and sometimes only, opportunity for regular, structured play, physical education, physical activity and sports. This is particularly true of those with financial or transportation challenges, and those with parents who, due to work commitments, lack the time to enable their children's participation. Balanceability offers a sustainable programme for schools to promote the physical benefits of cycling for young children as well as providing a fun and engaging activity. The programme offers children the ability to become competent cyclists at an early age through the development of balance and control.

This article shares how Freegrounds Infants School is using Balanceability.

“ I love the conversations and support the children give each other in their pursuit to cycle and when they can do it, we all yeeha! ”
Debbie Taylor
(EYFS member of staff)

“ My favourite part of the programme is seeing the children lift their foot off onto the pedal and cycle for the very first time. ”
Hannah Jones
(EYFS member of staff)

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Freegrounds Infant School has introduced and followed the Balanceability programme with our Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) cohort of 90 children, aged 4-5 years. This programme has been running for two years in our school. The eight members of staff within the EYFS team have undergone relevant training at various points throughout the years and are now able to teach, enhance and engage the children in their learning using the Balanceability programme.

“ I really enjoy seeing the children's self-confidence growing when they are on a bike. ”
Julie Rigby
(EYFS member of staff)

WHAT DO WE DO?

Julie Rigby, a member of the EYFS team, pioneered the Balanceability programme and enabled our environment to have the bikes out for the children to access and practise riding during their child-initiated Discovery Time. We also run a direct teaching session, once a day, where ten children undertake a set programme. This is supported by an adult to help them to progress through the steps and become brilliant riders. When they have completed the sessions, the children receive a highly sought-after certificate in Celebrative Reflection. The children's cycling is shared with parents on Tapestry (the school's tracking and reporting platform) with an overwhelmingly positive response.





“ I can ride a lot now and I go out at weekends with my family to ride super speedy. ”
Child in Blue Class

THE IMPACT

The impact is shown through many different areas of the Key Stage 1 curriculum and across the 17 areas of development we follow in EYFS. It can be seen in the children's risk-taking, along with their confidence to put on their own helmets and ride. An increase in independence has also been evident, with children attempting other challenges within our environment. The children have also shown high levels of pragmatism as they work through the varying activities to develop their skills from gliding to pedalling, all whilst never giving up.

“ I love how fast I can go and weave in and out of the obstacles. ”
Child in Yellow Class

It has been a pleasure to see the children's gross motor skills and fine motor skills improving during the programme. Since running Balanceability, we have noticed an improvement in the children's handwriting and levels of success when completing funky finger or tricky fine motor jobs. When observing data trends, we see that since Balanceability started the 'moving and handling' area has improved from 57 per cent at baseline to 95 per cent at exit. This is above the national average.

As well as helping us to meet our Lunchtime Mark, Balanceability has supported the children to have healthier and more active lives too. We have used the Primary PE and Sport Premium funding to purchase Balanceability training and equipment to ensure the school meets the Chief Medical Officers' target of all children taking part in at least one hour of physical activity each day. Over the past two years we have been able to support 88 out of 90 (98 per cent) children to ride and, within the 2018/19 cohort, by early July we already had 75 out of 81 (93 per cent) children who can do so with confidence. We are continuing to support those who found riding a bike a little tricky through direct teaching sessions.

“ I love the moment that the children can cycle, all their hard work and effort and you can see the joy on their faces. ”
Marie White
(EYFS member of staff)

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

We are always looking at ways to enhance and change our Balanceability programme based on the current cohort of children and their needs. This has meant ordering helmets and bikes suitable for the children especially our newest snazzy cycle bike, which the children can celebrate by riding when they have first learnt how. We are looking into how we can celebrate the children's amazing cycling with the parents, not just on Tapestry but with possibly a celebration cycle around our playground to showcase the children's fantastic learning.

“ I really like how I can challenge myself to use my brakes and not my feet. ”
Child in Red Class

CONCLUSION

Everyone involved in Balanceability at Freegrounds Infant School has hugely enjoyed implementing the programme and we have seen huge improvements in so many areas of learning because of it. It is an honour to be able to support the children to achieve such a necessary skill in life and one which makes them keen to be active and shows the love and thrill of cycling.

“ The staff clearly love teaching the children how to cycle and I hear so many comments and the pride in their voices when I overhear them telling parents and other staff members how they have helped the children achieve their independence and cycle on their own. At the new entrants' meetings each year we are proud to tell our families their child will learn many things when they come to school and one of those will be how to ride a bike. ”
Nikki Riches (Head Teacher)

Nikki Riches is Head Teacher at Freegrounds Infant School in Southampton. Samantha Wright is Commercial Manager at Balanceability Ltd. To find out more about Balanceability, visit: www.balanceability.com or email: info@balanceability.com