



St Mary's Catholic Primary

Early Years Policy

<i>Date Approved</i>	<i>September 2024</i>
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At St Mary's we believe that each child is entitled to a positive and meaningful start to their school life, in which they can establish solid foundations to ensure they develop into independent and fearless lifelong learners. Our Early Years children are taught in an Early Years Unit that includes children from age 3 to the end of reception.

Our aim is to:

- Encourage children to develop independence within a secure and nurturing atmosphere;
- Support children in building relationships through the development of social skills such as cooperation and sharing;
- Help each child to recognise their own strengths and achievements through experiencing success and by developing the confidence to work towards personal goals.

Our high expectations will enable each child to develop socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally and to achieve their full potential. We offer a structure for learning that has a range of starting points and unlimited availability for development through a wide range of new and exciting first-hand experiences that will give children the opportunity to consolidate, explore and test their skills, knowledge and understanding alongside existing experiences. We will ensure that children are kept healthy and safe and that they achieve the knowledge and skills they need to start school.

Curriculum

The Reception children follow the curriculum as outlined in the 2021 Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) document, which is available to download at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

This document clearly defines what we teach. The following policy details the specifics of how we teach in our setting.

The EYFS is based upon four principles:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments (with teaching and support from adults)
- Learning and Development

A Unique Child

We recognise that every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. We recognise that children develop in individual ways, at varying rates. Children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others; we use praise and encouragement, as well as celebration/ sharing assemblies and rewards, to encourage children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

Positive relationships

We recognise that children learn to be strong and independent from secure relationships and aim to develop caring, respectful and professional relationships with the children and their families.

Enabling environments

We recognise that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending the children's development. Through observations we assess the children's interests and stages of development and learning needs before planning challenging and achievable activities and experiences to extend their learning. The children are given opportunities to revisit learning through a range of challenges which are set up around the learning environment.

Learning and development

Our Early Years Unit is based in the external school building and is organised so that the seven areas of learning can be accessed, through a range of child and adult led activities. The learning environment is set up so that the children can explore and learn securely and safely. The areas of learning are defined and well organised so that children are able to find and locate equipment and resources independently.

Areas of Learning

The EYFS is made up of **three prime areas** of learning:

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional

Development There are **four specific areas** of learning:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World

- *Expressive Arts and Design*

At St. Mary's primary School all areas of learning are delivered through a well-planned progressive curriculum, with a balance of adult led and child-initiated activities.

Throughout Reception our long, medium and short-term plans ensure that each child has the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in every area and at the appropriate developmental level. Our long-term planning ensures coverage so that all children have opportunities to work towards and achieve the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) that define the expectations for most children to reach by the end of the EYFS. Our half termly planning allows flexibility to ensure that both children's needs and interests are considered.

Play based activities

Learning through play underpins our approach to teaching and learning in the foundation stage and the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum. We embrace the fact that young children learn best from activities and experiences that interest and inspire them to learn. In doing so we provide children with stimulating, active experiences in which they can explore and develop their learning and to help them make sense of the world. Children have opportunities through their play to think creatively and critically alongside other children as well as on their own. They are able to practise skills, build upon and revisit prior learning and experiences at their own level and pace. Play gives our children the opportunity to pursue their own interests, inspire those around them and consolidate their understanding and skills. The children learn to adapt, negotiate, communicate, discuss, investigate and ask questions. Our adults take an active role in child-initiated play through observing, modelling, facilitating, teaching and extending play, skills and language.

Play based activities are catered for through a variety of learning areas in both our indoor and outdoor classroom. These areas of the classroom develop throughout the year based on the children's interests and needs, as well as the class learning focus. The space allows the children to access adult led learning and child-initiated play. The areas of learning provide stimuli based on our topic themed approach.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

The EYFS also includes the characteristics of effective teaching and learning and the reception teacher plans activities with these in mind. The characteristics highlight the importance of a child's attitude to learning and their ability to play, explore and think critically about the world around them. The three characteristics are;

- *Playing and Exploring* – children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’
- *Active Learning* – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- *Creating and Thinking Critically* – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Key Person

Each child in Early Years is assigned a key person. The key person ensures that the children’s learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. This includes:

- *Practising previously taught speed sounds each week (Using the Read Write inc programme) and/or hearing them read*
- *Checking the child’s school planner*
- *Ensuring the child’s learning journey demonstrates ‘wow’ moments*
- *Making notes of next steps and particular interests and sharing these with the early years team*
- *Planning opportunities for the child to learn through activities that interest them*
- *Engage and support parents and/or carers in guiding their child’s development at home.*

Assessment

At St. Mary’s Primary School we believe that assessment is key to enable our practitioners to plan for each child’s next step in learning. Assessment also plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs and to plan activities and support.

We assess children’s knowledge, understanding, skills and achievements by gathering from a range of sources; observations of the children in play, in adult led activities, through discussions with parents and carers and through talking to the children. Teachers use this information to make a professional judgement about whether a child is working at the expected level of development.

The Reception teachers use their professional knowledge to understand the children’s level of development. If they have any concerns about the child’s progress, they discuss them with parents.

Every child in Reception has a ‘Learning Journal’ in which samples of the children’s learning

are kept. There is also an online learning journals to enable staff to take photos, write notes and share 'wow' moments with parents. The children have work books for Writing and RE which shows a collection of work produced during adult led activities.

Formal Assessments

During the first few weeks of starting school the class teacher will carry out a baseline assessment with each Reception child to establish their individual knowledge, understanding and skills. Staff use this information to plan appropriately for the children's next steps in learning.

Two formal assessments take place in the reception year:

- Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), taken in the first six weeks in which a child starts reception
- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), completed at the end of the EYFS

Summative assessment

Each term the class teacher will make a professional judgement about whether a child is working at the expected level of development for each of the seven areas of learning. Staff will use the 'Northamptonshire Cohort Analysis Document' to summarise the attainment of the cohort at key intervals. Children not currently on track to meet expected levels are identified and the support or interventions that they need to accelerate their progress is considered. Appropriate interventions are then implemented and monitored at the end of an agreed period of time to measure the impact on children's outcomes. Progress is discussed with the head teacher during half termly pupil progress meetings.

The end of year assessment is carried out to meet the requirements of the statutory reporting of the Foundation Stage Profile. Each child's level of development is assessed against the early learning goals as outlined in the EYFS framework. Observations, samples of children's work and teachers' knowledge of the children are used to make an assessment as to whether the child has met the expected levels of development - 'expected' or not yet reached expected levels - 'emerging'. This is the EYFS Profile.

Transition

Transition for the start of the school year is carefully planned for. We have established a strong procedure for transitions to ensure that our children and parents are as confident and secure as they can be when facing the challenges of their child starting school.

Before the beginning of the school year the Reception staff visit Nursery and Pre-School Settings to meet the children, talk to staff and discuss each child's learning needs. The children and their families are welcomed into school for settling in days to ensure that children have the time to become secure and familiar with new routines, staff, classroom and school setting before starting school full time. During this time the child's parents have an introduction meeting with the head teacher whilst their child can explore the classroom setting and spend time with teaching staff.

Nursery and Pre-School settings are asked to complete and return our Early Years Pupil Transition form. This provides staff with key information about each child before they start school.

For the first few weeks of school the children explore play based activities to enable them to become confident and familiar with the environment. It is during this time that the class teacher carries out baseline assessments for each child.

At the end of Reception children have the opportunity to meet with their new teacher in their classroom prior to starting Year one. At the end of each school year teachers share each child's knowledge, understanding and achievements, including end of year assessment data, with their next class teacher to ensure that all teachers have a well-rounded picture of the children prior to the new school year. Class teachers use the St. Mary's transition document to guide this meeting and provide information regarding specific needs for the children.

Parents as Partners

We believe that parents and carers are a child's first educator and therefore work very closely to ensure they are involved in what their child does at school. We want parents to feel they can speak to us about their child and to feel comfortable in our setting. We offer parents the opportunity to share their child's learning environment, have time to talk informally with the practitioners and to meet other parents during school 'book look' sessions and during termly parent consultation meetings.

We also offer parents 'curriculum workshops' to provide advice and information on how they can support their child's learning at home. This takes place during the Autumn term.

Parents are welcomed and encouraged to share information about their child, to ask questions and to discuss their child's learning with the teachers. Parents are provided with 'wow' forms which they can fill in to share their child's learning achievements at home.

At the beginning of the year parents are encouraged to take time to settle their child happily into class during the first few weeks of school. We then encourage the children's independence by asking them to say good bye to parents on the playground. The children line up in class groups and are greeted by the class teacher. The children come into class to put their own things away and sign in using the self-registration post box.

Health & safety and safeguarding

Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them. We follow the safeguarding and welfare requirements detailed in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Guidance (2021) and we adhere to the school's safeguarding policy.

We are a healthy school. Our children under 5 receive free milk and all children have access to fresh water and free fruit from a Government scheme. Reception children who stay for lunch are eligible for free school meals or can choose to bring in a healthy packed lunch.

The reception class have access to their own toileting facilities and we teach the children the importance of hygiene and hand washing techniques. Throughout the year we plan cooking activities to give children experiences of a range of healthy food. The children are taught about the importance of good oral health and how to keep teeth clean and healthy.

As part of the 'Personal, Social and Emotional Development' area of learning, the children are supported to manage their emotions so that they develop a positive sense of self and have confidence in their own abilities. The children also have access to the worry box in school.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Head Teacher and the Early Years Leader. Any alterations that come from this review will be discussed and ratified by the full Governing Body.