



ST. MARY'S
ACADEMY TRUST

St Mary's Academy Trust

EYFS Policy

Date agreed by Performance and Standards Committee – October 2023

Date to be reviewed: October 2024

Introduction

Early Years education is the foundation upon which young children build the rest of their schooling. It is a holistic education that encompasses all learning and development. Young children need an environment which is healthy, safe and secure; where they are able to grow in confidence and fulfil their potential. Each of our Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) classrooms across the Trust should provide a stimulating environment where young children can play, explore, experiment, develop confidence, be curious, and learn.

We believe it is our duty to develop a joy of learning within our young children, enabling them to feel motivated and excited by the opportunity to learn through play and first-hand experiences. This policy outlines the purpose, nature and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage across St. Mary's Academy Trust.

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Headteacher and Local Governing Body of each school, alongside the practitioners working in the EYFS setting, including both teaching and non-teaching staff. In the policy, the term 'setting' refers to the Early Years educational provision within each of the academies. The term 'practitioner' refers to the members of staff working with children within the setting.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and documents:

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023)

Development Matters

EYFS Welfare Requirements

Curriculum Policy

Assessment Policy

RSE Policy

Teacher Standards

Code of Conduct

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Aims of the Early Years Foundation Stage

In the EYFS settings across St. Mary's Academy Trust, we believe that all children are entitled to the best possible start to their school life, both academically and emotionally, spiritually and morally, in order to enable them to develop their full potential.

We aim to support each child's learning, welfare and developmental needs in the following ways of equal importance:

- recognising that all children are unique and special;
- understanding that children develop in individual ways and at varying rates - physically, cognitively, linguistically, socially and emotionally;
- providing a safe, secure and caring environment where children feel happy and know that they are valued by the practitioners looking after them;
- fostering and nurturing children's self-confidence and self-esteem;

- developing an awareness of their own identity and role within the community;
- teaching them to express and communicate their needs and feelings in appropriate ways;
- encouraging children's independence and decision-making, supporting them to learn through their mistakes and through child-initiated learning;
- developing children's understanding of social skills and the values and codes of behaviour required for people to work together harmoniously;
- supporting children to develop care, respect and appreciation for others, including those with beliefs, cultures and opinions which differ from their own;
- understanding the importance of play in children's learning and development;
- providing learning experiences in play which reflect children's personal interests and areas of curiosity in order to encourage and develop their natural desire, interest, excitement and motivation to learn;
- providing experiences which build upon children's existing knowledge and understanding in order to challenge, stimulate and extend their learning and development;
- providing effective learning opportunities in a range of stimulating and safe environments, both inside and outside.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework

Teaching in the EYFS setting is delivered in accordance with the government's statutory document 'The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (Sept 2023) This document is a principled approach to Early Years education, bringing together children's welfare, learning and development requirements through four themes: 'A Unique Child', 'Positive Relationships', 'Enabling Environments' and 'Children Learn in Different Ways and at Different Rates'.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning:

The ways in which young children engage with other people and their environment – playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically – underpin learning and development across all areas of EYFS and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner.

The curriculum is centred on 3 prime areas of learning:

1. *Communication and Language*
2. *Physical Development*
3. *Personal, Social and Emotional Development*

Providers must also support activities through four specific areas which strengthen the prime areas. These are:

1. *Literacy*
2. *Mathematics*
3. *Understanding of the World*
4. *Expressive Arts and Design*

These areas of learning and development address young children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development. No one aspect of development stands in isolation from the others as all the areas of learning are closely interlinked. This ensures the delivery of a holistic, child-centred curriculum which allows children to make links between what they are learning. All areas of learning are given equal weighting and value.

Throughout St. Mary's Academy Trust, we believe that Early Years education is important in its own right and should not be viewed simply as preparation for the next stage of children's education. We believe that the EYFS framework allows a natural progression into the National Curriculum at the beginning of Year 1 and emphasize the importance of effective transition between these two phases of a child's education. Careful curriculum planning, liaising and communication ensure there is a clear progression between the two stages.

Pedagogy

We recognise that young children learn best when they are active. We understand that active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods. Therefore, we believe that Early Years education should be as practical as possible and our EYFS settings have an ethos of learning through play. We recognise the importance of children's play. It is an essential and rich part of their learning process, supporting them in all areas of development. Play is a powerful motivator encouraging children to be creative and to develop their ideas, understanding and language. Play is also flexible and able to suit the preferred learning style of the child. It can provide multiple ways for children to learn a variety of different skills and concepts.

In our EYFS settings across St. Mary's Academy Trust, there should be a balance between child initiated, adult initiated and adult led learning. All pupils should have opportunities throughout the day to work with different practitioners within the EYFS setting, both in focus groups and within the areas of continuous provision as well as through structured taught sessions including phonics, maths and topical subjects such as PSED.

In the EYFS settings across the Trust, practitioners should provide both structured and unstructured play opportunities; inside and outside. These activities are designed to engage children in practical, first-hand experiences which will support them to discover, explore, investigate, develop their personal interests and areas of curiosity, and help to make sense of the world around them as they begin to understand specific concepts. Play opportunities are also set up to provide children with opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge, demonstrating their skills and level of understanding. In providing these active learning opportunities through play we understand the central position of play within the EYFS framework.

The EYFS through St. Mary's Academy Trust understand the importance of early language and a love of reading that supports children throughout their school journey. In the EYFS language rich opportunities are carefully planned for and there is an emphasis placed on acquiring early vocabulary and a love of words and books from the beginning. Systematic teaching of phonics takes place on a daily basis using an approved DfE scheme.

Assessment and Record Keeping

Baseline assessment is carried out during the children's first four weeks upon entering the setting. Baseline allows EYFS staff to assess children in relation to age expectations across all areas of the curriculum. Baseline information will be used to track children's progress during their time at the school. In addition, baseline is used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the cohort and, as a result, to inform planning and provision within the settings.

St. Mary's Academy Trust use a variety of ongoing and formative assessments to assess as the children move through Foundation Stage. As part of their everyday practice, practitioners build their knowledge of each child by prioritising their interactions and conversations, constantly observing during continuous provision. They use this professional knowledge to make a series of judgements about each child based on a clear set of assessment criteria.

Throughout their Foundation Stage education, judgements are made on children's development, based on practitioners' evidence of children's behaviour observed independently and consistently in their self-initiated activities across all areas of learning and development. There is continuous monitoring and assessment of each child's development as well as pupil progress meetings around children's stages and next steps and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. This is updated at least once each term to track individual progress. At the end of the year, it provides a summary of every child's development and learning achievements.

Ongoing assessment is an essential aspect of the effective running of the EYFS settings across St. Mary's Academy Trust. Regular, planned and focused assessments are made of children's learning and individual needs. A record of each child's progress in all areas of their learning is kept through a range of observations and assessments. Importantly, practitioner knowledge of the children is valued highly. The main EYFS assessment method is through practitioners' observations of children in different teaching and learning contexts, including both adult focused activities and child-initiated play.

Practitioners spend time working with the children in the setting, building an in depth knowledge of the children and recording 'wow' moments of learning through observations. Each child is designated a Key Person in EYFS, however, all practitioners are involved in the learning journey of all children. Practitioners use informal observations to support their developing knowledge of individual children. Each EYFS class across the Trust carefully tracks children's learning within the setting to ensure knowledge about what individual children can and cannot do and to inform next steps for learning.

Through a combination of methods including photographs, videos, samples of work, verbal quotations and teacher talk, a learning journey for each child is created. Parents/carers and children are encouraged to contribute to these over the course of the year, either online or through sharing information with Early Years practitioners. The EYFS teacher is responsible for ensuring that all assessment data and records are kept up to date and accurate. St Mary's Academy Trust supports EYFS practitioners in moderating judgements both within and between settings to ensure consistency across the Trust.

Data is submitted termly to St. Mary's Academy Trust. This data is analysed as a Trust in EYFS leader meetings to discuss any trends or patterns along with next steps. An overview of the data submitted to the Performance and Standards Committee of St. Mary's Academy Trust by the CEO.

Planning

The EYFS framework provides a long term plan to follow by ensuring that all Early Learning Goals are covered throughout the academic year. Medium term planning is created with all Early Years practitioners' involvement and takes into account the individual children's learning and developmental needs as well as the cultural capital of the cohort.. All areas of learning and development are planned for and available to access within the setting, including for parents/carers. The learning opportunities provided include a range of adult focused and child-initiated activities indoors and outdoors. Educational visits within the local community and further afield are also planned to support children's learning within the classroom. Plans include opportunities for children to explore, British Values, the diversity of their community and supports inclusion for all. Experiences to enhance children's understanding of the wider world are planned in to support and enrich the children's time in the Foundation Stage. All plans provide opportunities to develop vocabulary and link to high quality texts that foster a love of reading.

Parents as Partners

Throughout St. Mary's Academy Trust we recognise the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents, as highlighted by the EYFS framework. We understand that an effective partnership between school and home will have a positive impact on children's learning and development as well as knowing the value of parents as stakeholders. Practitioners encourage the regular sharing of information about a child with their parents. We value the role of parents as children's primary educators. Through regular contact with parents, for example through questionnaires, parents' meetings and informal meetings at the beginning and end of the day, practitioners encourage parents to share their unique knowledge of their child, providing further insight into the child as an individual (e.g. characteristics, interests, experiences, likes, dislikes). This supports practitioners in establishing interesting and stimulating learning experiences, responding to children's needs and interests.

Parents are kept informed of what is happening in the setting in a variety of ways, for example through online learning journeys, twitter, blogs, regular letters, reading records, formal parents' evenings and meetings and informal conversations at the beginning and end of the day. This also gives suggestions of how parents can support their children's learning at home; consolidating and building on what has been covered in the setting. While there is no expectation that children in EYFS should be set formal 'homework', reading books are sent home for the children to share and enjoy with their parents/ carers and support the development of early reading. Reading books are matched to the individual child's reading ability and phonics phase. Other opportunities for learning at home should follow the individual school's homework policy but should include phonics related work for children in Foundation 2 as appropriate to the child's individual ability.

Parents may be invited into the setting on other occasions such as open afternoons or celebration events where children share their learning. Each setting is committed to providing a friendly, open-door ethos. All parents are able to view the Learning Journey of their child at any time on request. Parents are always welcomed into our schools and encouraged to discuss any concerns they might have.

Equal Opportunities

All practitioners have a responsibility to maintain positive attitudes to diversity and difference, ensuring that inclusive practice is delivered in the EYFS setting. All children, irrespective of gender, ability, special educational need, ethnicity, culture or religion, and social circumstances, have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development within the EYFS settings across the Trust.