

St George's Church of England Academy

Early Years Stage Policy

Many Hearts Make a School



Let us love one another, for love comes from God. (John 4:7-8)

Every Child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.

("Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage" March 2012)

This policy outlines the teaching, organisation and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage at St George's Church of England Academy.

Introduction

Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. At St George's Church of England Academy we greatly value the important role that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) plays in laying secure foundations for future learning and development, however we also believe early childhood is valid in itself, as part of life. It is important to view the EYFS as preparation for life-long learning and not simply preparation for the next stage of education.

The EYFS is for children from birth to five years of age. At St George's Church of England Academy the EYFS curriculum applies to children from the ages of three to the end of the reception year.

All children begin school with a variety of experiences and learning. It is the privilege of the practitioners working in foundation to take on the task of building upon that prior learning and experience. This is done through a holistic approach to learning, ensuring that parents/guardians, key persons work effectively together to support children's learning and development.

We are committed to underpinning our provision with the four themes of the Early Years Foundation Stage:

Four guiding principles shape our practice in the Foundation Stage are :-

- every child is a **unique child**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;
- children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**;
- children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers; and
- children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities. We do not view these areas of learning as separate entities but that they are very much interconnected with one another. When we plan activities they are designed to meet several, and sometimes many, learning intentions. We aim to deliver all the areas through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities.

Intent - Aims and Purpose of the Early Years Foundation Stage

It is every child's right to grow up safe, healthy both mentally and physically, enjoying and achieving their potential and making a positive contribution.. At St George's Church of England Academy, the overarching aim of the EYFS is to help young children achieve these outcomes.

We aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which will enable each child to develop personally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, creatively and intellectually to his or her full potential. Each child is valued as an individual and teaching and learning is based on the understanding that children develop at different rates.

We believe:

- Every child is unique.
- All children have strengths which need to be built upon.
- Young children's learning should be built on that which is familiar to them.
- Learning should be primarily active, first-hand experiences. Young children need opportunities and space to explore and discover.
- Play is an essential and rich part of the learning process.
- Talk is central to the learning process. It should be reciprocal and often initiated and led by the child.
- Learning should be a pleasurable and rewarding experience.
- Every child needs to feel emotionally secure in order to develop to their full potential.
- Young children need time to practice and consolidate their learning.
- Young children are social beings and learning should take place in a social context.

- Children's independence and self-discipline need to be promoted.

At St George's Church of England Academy we will:

- Provide a happy, safe, stimulating and challenging programme of learning and development for the children to experience as they begin their journey through school.
- Provide a broad, balanced, relevant, fun and creative curriculum that will set in place firm foundation for further learning and development in Key Stage 1 and beyond and enable choice and decision making, fostering independence and self-confidence.
- Use and value what each child can do, assessing their individual needs and next steps and helping each child to progress. We will use a variety of assessments methods including formative and summative assessments.
- Develop positive relationships and parents and carers to build a strong partnership in supporting their children.
- Provide a caring and inclusive learning environment which is sensitive to the requirements of the individual child including those who have additional needs.

The Early Years education we offer our children is based on the following principles:

- It builds on what our children already know and can do; It ensures that no child is excluded or disadvantaged
- It offers a structure for learning that has a range of starting points, content that matches the needs of young children and activities that provide opportunities for learning both indoors and outdoors
- It provides a rich and stimulating environment
- It acknowledges the importance of a full working partnership with parents and carers and the benefits of sharing both successes and concerns with them.

A Unique Child

We recognise that children learn and develop in various ways and at different rates and this is reflected in our provision. The characteristics of effective learning support the child to become a motivated and effective learner. Children will play and explore and 'have a go' at using available resources, developing their language and experiences. Children will develop resilience and enjoy achievements through active learning and will make links, explore their ideas and strategies for problem solving through creating and thinking critically. Practitioners support children in developing all these characteristics through playing alongside children and where necessary, scaffolding and supporting their thoughts. Children are treated fairly regardless of race, religion, gender or abilities. We welcome all children and families into our setting so that they feel included, safe and valued.

The Learning Environment

At St George's Church of England Academy, our areas are thoroughly thought out to allow children to explore and learn securely and safely. There are specific areas where the children can be active, be quiet, be creative etc.

In EYFS we recognise the importance of a rich environment both inside and outside. The environment is set up to support all learning areas, where children are able to find and locate equipment and resources independently. Children have access to both the inside and the outside environment at various points in the day which is known to have a positive effect on the children's development. Spending time outdoors offers opportunities for exploring and learning things differently to when pupils are indoors and gives things a different perspective. The children can explore, use their sense and be physically active and exuberant.

Learning and Development

Our curriculum for the Foundation Stage reflects the learning aims and objectives as set out in the Statutory Framework 2021.

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational provision in all early years' settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected, and none can be delivered in isolation from the others. Our children's learning requires a balance of adult led and childinitiated activities in order for children to develop effectively and to give them the best chance of obtaining a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year.

Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive. The three Prime Areas are:

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development** – children develop confidence and self-esteem, learn how to manage feelings and respect others
- **Communication and Language** – children have opportunities to speak and listen in a range of situations and experience a rich language environment
- **Physical Development** - children have opportunities to be active and develop coordination (both gross motor and fine motor).

Practitioners will also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The Specific Areas are:

- **Literacy** – involves children learning how letters link to the sounds and begin to read and write
- **Mathematics** – children have opportunities to develop counting and calculating skills, to use numbers in everyday activities and recognise and describe shapes and measures
- **Understanding of the World** – children have opportunities to find out about people and communities, the environment and technology
- **Expressive Arts and Design** – involves exploring feelings and ideas through music, dance, role play and design

These areas help practitioners plan within an overall curriculum framework thereby ensuring development for all children in all areas of the curriculum. For the children, however, learning is holistic and cannot be compartmentalised. One experience may provide children with opportunities to develop a range of competences, skills and concepts across several areas of learning.

The areas of learning are further broken down into progressive and developmental curriculum that builds upon previous knowledge and skills. At the end of the Key Stage, reception practioners use the early learning goals, to assess whether individual children are expected or emerging against these level descriptors.

Practitioners plan together to ensure progression and continuity. The learning experience will offer a balance of adult supported, adult directed and child initiated activities. They will also allow for a variety of learning styles e.g. individual, small or large group. As the children move through the EYFS the approach and organisation of the day will change to offer a more formal learning experience in readiness for Year 1.

Teaching and learning style

Teaching and learning in the early years curriculum is carefully planned and structured to meet individual needs.

We plan with our practitioner partners, organising a range of experience and opportunities which give children the chance to make decisions and choices, work individually or in groups and explore the learning environment. We organise the curriculum according to the seasons of the year, the interests and fascination of the children and make links in all 7 areas.

The more general features of good practice in our school that relate to the EYFS are:

- The partnership between practitioners and parents, so that our children feel secure at school and develop a sense of well-being and achievement;
- The understanding that practitioners have of how children develop and learn, and how this affects their teaching;
- The range of approaches used that provide first-hand experiences, give clear explanation, make appropriate interventions and extend and develop play and talk or means of communication.
- The carefully planned curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of the children in our Early Years community and helps children achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of the EYFS;
- The provision for children to take part in activities that build on and extend their interest and develop their intellectual, physical, social and emotional abilities.
- The encouragement for children to communicate and talk about their learning, and to develop independence and self-management;
- The support for learning with appropriate and accessible indoor and outdoor space facilities and equipment;
- The identification of the progress and future learning needs of children through observations, which are regularly shared with parents;
- The good relationships between our school and the settings that our children experience prior to joining our school;
- The clear aims of our work, and the regular monitoring to evaluate and improve what we do;
- The regular identification of training needs of all adults working within the EYFS.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

We ensure that our environment and delivery of the curriculum incorporates the three characteristics of effective teaching and learning.

Play And Exploring the Early Years Foundation Stage

“Children’s play reflects their wide ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children’s development.”

Through play our children explore and develop learning experiences, which help them make sense of the world. They practise and build up ideas, and learn how to control themselves and understand the need for rules. They have the opportunity to think creatively alongside other children as well as on their own. They communicate with others as they investigate and solve problems. They express fears or re-live anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

Active Learning

“Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods.”

Active learning occurs when children are motivated and interested. Children need to have some independence and control over their learning. As children develop their confidence they learn to make decisions. It provides children with a sense of satisfaction as they take ownership of their learning.

Creativity and Critical Thinking

“When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.”

Children should be given opportunity to be creative through all areas of learning, not just through the arts. Adults can support children’s thinking and help them to make connections by showing genuine interest, offering encouragement, clarifying ideas and asking open questions. Children can access resources freely and are allowed to move them around the classroom to extend their learning.

Inclusion in the Foundation Stage

In our school we believe that all our children matter. We give our children every opportunity to achieve their best. We do this by taking account of our children’s range of life experiences when planning for their learning (see our policy on school inclusion).

In the EYFS, we set realistic and challenging expectations that meet the needs of our children, so that most achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of the stage. Some children progress beyond this point. We achieve this by planning to meet the needs of boys and girls, children with special educational needs, children who are more able, children with disabilities, children from all social and cultural backgrounds, children of different ethnic groups and those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

We meet the needs of all our children through:

- planning opportunities that build upon and extend children’s knowledge, experience and interests, and develop their self-esteem and confidence;
- using a wide range of teaching strategies based on children’s learning needs;
- providing a wide range of opportunities to motivate and support children and to help them to learn effectively;
- providing a safe and supportive learning environment in which the contribution of all children is valued;
- using resources which reflect diversity and are free from discrimination and stereotyping;
- planning challenging activities for children whose ability and understanding are in advance of their language and communication skills;
- monitoring children’s progress and taking action to provide support as necessary. This involves speech therapy for some of our children.

Assessment

Ongoing assessment is an integral part of teaching, learning and development processes. Practitioners observe children to identify their level of achievement, interests and learning styles. These observations are used to identify developmental gaps, support differentiation, inform children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress. These observations are uploads to SEESAW. Practitioners also take into account observations shared by parents and/or carers.

In Nursery, each child has a "This is Me" booklet in which contains the children starting and end points and show progression throughout the year. A child development approach is used with regards to assessment. WOW moments are notes, learning stories, child development checklists and spotlight observations are used to highlight a child's interests, their strengths, next developmental steps as well as the progress they are making.

Two Statutory assessments take place in Reception. A Baseline Assessment that is produced by the Government takes place in the first three weeks of a child starting Reception. At the end of the EYFS, against the profile for each child. Pupils are assessed against the 17 early learning goals, indicating whether they are:

- Meeting expected levels of development
- Not yet reaching expected levels ('emerging')

The profile reflects ongoing observations and discussions with parents and/or carers. The results of the profile are shared with parents and/or carers and inform the child's transition process into year one.

The role of parents

We believe that all parents have an important role to play in the education of their child. We recognise the role that parents have played, and their future role, in educating the children. We do this through:

- talking to parents about their child before their child starts in our foundation setting;
- the teacher visits all children in their previous setting prior to their starting our school;
- the children have the opportunity to spend time with their teacher before starting our Early Years Foundation Stage;
- inviting all parents to an induction meeting during the term before their child starts our foundation setting;
- offering parents regular (both formal and informal) opportunities to talk about their child's progress;
- offering parents opportunities to take an active role in their child's learning and development through uploading photos, videos and comments to SEESAW
- encouraging parents to talk to the child's teacher if there are any concerns. There is a formal meeting for parents each term at which the teacher and the parent discuss the child's progress in private. Parents receive a report on their child's attainment and progress at the end of each school year;
- having flexible admission arrangements that enable children and parents to become secure, and by allowing time to discuss each child's circumstances;
- arranging for children to start nursery over the first three weeks of term. We stagger the starting time of each child over this period, so that the teacher can welcome each child individually into our school. We encourage parents to stay if there are problems with the child's admission

- arranging a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between child, school and parents;
- offering a range of activities that support the involvement of parents. There is regular communication with home through the child's school diary. We invite parents to curriculum and workshop evenings to discuss the kind of work that the children undertaking in Foundation, with particular emphasis on Communication and Language, Literacy and Mathematics.

Child's Voice

At St George's we are aware that children give us information in many different ways and that are active participants in their own learning. We ensure that we provide effective ways of supporting children's communication and are at the heart of the learning process, ensuring that they are fully involved in planning and reviewing their learning alongside practitioners within our foundation unit so that they engage in meaningful exchanges with adults and other children in such as way as to extend their ideas and viewpoints. We endeavour to do this through the use of talking and thinking floor books, class books, learning stories and journals and display.

Our image of children no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not only see them as engaged in action with objects, does not emphasise only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the reflective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and children." (*oris Malaguzzi, quoted in Penn, H., Comparing Nurseries: Practitioners and Children in Italy, Spain and the UK, Paul Chapman Publishing, 1997, p117*)

Resources

We plan a learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, that encourages a positive attitude to learning. We use materials and equipment that reflect both the community that the children come from and the wider world. We encourage the children to make their own selection of the activities on offer, as we believe that this encourages independent learning.

Conclusion

The EYFS aims to provide every child with a rich and diverse experience through a range of activities. It is hoped that this will provide a foundation for life-long enjoyment.

'I promise you that every day your child will learn something new. Some days they will bring it home in their hands, some days they will bring it home in their heads and some days they will bring it home in their hearts'. Valerie Welk