

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School - Early Years Policy

This Policy should be considered in conjunction with other of St. Mary's School Policies, where relevant.

Rationale

Introduction

Early Years education should provide a smooth transition from home to school which will, for the vast majority of St. Mary's pupils, include a period of one year in our own Nursery class.

The children are developing rapidly in every way – physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. They will do so successfully in a secure environment where high expectations of both behaviour and achievement encourage them to become self-confident individuals with a positive self-image and high self-esteem.

Early Years education is frequently cross-curricular, as young children do not separate their learning into subjects. However, they must be provided with a curriculum which covers all areas of learning and experience recommended in the DfEE statement of desirable outcomes and further clarified through the Early Learning Goals and the requirements of the Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum.

The Early Years Curriculum is frequently based upon learning through play but this approach requires careful planning, a structure which encourages purpose to the play and appropriate adult intervention.

An Approach to Learning

Young children learn by doing. The bulk of their experience should be direct, first-hand and multi-sensory. There should be a balance between activities of different kinds; those which encourage moving about and being still; making a noise and being quiet; working alone, in pairs or in small groups. There should also be a balance between the novelty and stimulus of new activities and the familiarity of old ones that consolidate children's learning and boost their confidence.

Activities that have no meaning for the child can make school seem an alien and inhospitable place.

Experiences which will give children the possibility of developing their thinking and exploring possibilities, practising and refining skills at their own level without constant failure are crucial. Play experiences therefore need to be of good quality, well-planned and organised. Sensitive and well-timed adult intervention is vital – all adults should be as involved as possible in children's play, thus being able to exploit the learning possibilities as they arise.

Admissions

Admission to St Mary's School is, in the normal way, either to the Nursery Class or to one of the Reception Classes. Although the relationship between admission to a nursery class and entrance to mainstream schooling is a comparatively 'grey' area of governmental legislation, the Governors of St Mary's have ensured direct progression. Automatic admission to the main school has been enshrined in the Criteria for Admission to St. Mary's School and, in order to ensure fairness, the same criteria for siblings, Catholicity, distance etc. are used when considering applications for a place in the Nursery Class.

Application is made to the Governing Body, which is the admissions authority for the school, by means of an application form which must be supported by confirmation of Catholicity from a Parish Priest. The closing date for applications is the last day of October before the academic year in which a child will be admitted.

It is the intention, at St Mary's, that children should spend one complete year in the Nursery Class before moving into one of the Reception Classes and this is the case for the vast majority of the pupils.

There are two points of entry to the school, in September and January. Children who are born in the first six months of the *academic year* are usually admitted in September and those born in the second half of the *academic year* are admitted in January. However, points of entry are dependent on the dates of birth of all applicants for any one cohort of pupils.

There are 25 part-time places in the Nursery Class and an additional place (in each of the morning and afternoon sessions) which may be awarded "in emergency". Any additional place is awarded, as a specific exception, by the Governing Body.

Policy into Practice

Environment

Nursery and Reception Classrooms should be similar in organisation. The room should be bright, welcoming and well organised; areas should have relevant equipment that is labelled with picture/word labels. Children should be trained to care for the equipment, which should be physically accessible to the children and should be used flexibly to challenge the children.

There should be opportunities for the children to make choices, decisions and extend their own learning.

Positive interaction with adults is crucial to challenging and supporting the children: adults should be interested, acknowledge the value of what the child is doing and give appropriate praise.

Language and Literacy

Aims

Children should:

- enjoy listening to and using spoken and written language
- enjoy listening to stories, rhymes and poems
- sustain attentive listening, responding with relevant comments, questions or actions
- interact with others, taking turns in conversations
- extend their vocabulary
- retell narratives in the correct sequence
- hear and say initial and final sounds in words and short vowel sounds within words
- link sounds to letters
- sound the letters of the alphabet
- name the letters of the alphabet
- read a range of familiar words and simple sentences independently
- use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable and correctly formed letters
- attempt writing for various purposes
- write plausible phonetic attempts at simple and then more complex words
- write their own names, labels, captions and simple sentences
- start to use punctuation

Delivery

The children need to see adults enjoying reading and writing, showing enthusiasm for stories extended into drama, puppetry etc. and enthusiastically using reference books. The choices made by the children in other areas need to be exploited to give opportunities for literacy, as does their previous experience of labels, signs etc.

Activities need to be set in meaningful contexts where children can see the link between spoken and written language. This can be achieved by writing up and displaying rhymes and songs used in the class, making books about class events and outings, including reading and writing resources in role play areas etc.

Books need to be shared with children rather than simply being read to them as the latter restricts the educational benefits of the exercise. The sharing of books is used to draw the children's attention to text, words, one to one matching, letters, sounds, the use of pictures as an aid to decoding text etc. The connection with writing is emphasised by drawing attention to letter formation, upper and lower case letters, punctuation etc.

Just as children's first attempts at reading are valued for their understanding of the fact that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom, so children's first attempts at writing are valued for displaying this understanding in action. They begin to understand that we use marks on a page to convey meaning from writers to readers. They are encouraged to become confident and competent through 'having a go' while learning to manipulate writing tools with a flowing motion.

Reading and writing in their broadest sense, as the basis of the vast majority of learning experiences for both children and adults, need to be a (the?) major emphasis of work in Early Years classes.

Numeracy

Aims

Children should:

- say and use number names in order and in familiar contexts
- count reliably up to ten everyday objects
- recognise the numerals 1 – 9
- use language such as 'more', 'less', 'greater', 'smaller', 'heavier', 'lighter' etc.
- use the vocabulary of adding and subtracting
- relate addition to combining objects and subtraction to 'taking away'
- recognise and create patterns
- learn the names and simple properties of shapes such as circles and rectangles
- begin to describe position
- begin to use mathematical ideas to solve problems

Delivery

The children need to see adults model counting in a wide range of contexts, especially the activities which the children themselves are involved in. Examples of this are the number of jumps, steps, bangs on a drum, prints made on a paper, buttons to do up etc. Many stories and rhymes are available which involve number and counting as are opportunities for counting when carrying out routine operations in school – e.g. "How many pencils/pieces of paper/cups etc. do we need?"

Adults should model the use of a wide range of appropriate vocabulary such as ‘more than’, ‘less than’, ‘enough’, ‘the same as’, ‘equal’ etc.

Simple operations with numbers up to 10 are introduced and demonstration of writing number sentences along with the accompanying vocabulary such as ‘add’, ‘plus’, ‘together’ etc.

There is a need for a range of practical measuring activities balanced with planned opportunities for developing an appropriate vocabulary and for ‘have a go’ methods of recording. In order to begin to grasp the concepts of measuring, the range of practical activities needs to involve repetition of the same concept through a variety of approaches.

The children’s attention is drawn to the names of shapes and the wide application of those names in the everyday world. Construction activities give invaluable opportunities for the introduction of objective vocabulary such as ‘straight’, ‘curved’, ‘edge’, ‘side’, ‘corner’ etc in a meaningful context. Very young children are able – and should be given the opportunity - to appreciate such more complex mathematical concepts as symmetry, tessellation, rotation etc.

In the Early years, it is essential that the children develop a curiosity and enthusiasm for mathematics and a confidence in their ability in order to avoid the onset of the reticence which can be all too difficult to combat later on in their future educational life.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Aims

Children should:

- use all their senses to investigate objects and materials
- find out about objects and living things through direct observation
- look for similarities, differences, patterns and changes
- ask questions about why things happen and how things work
- build and construct, selecting appropriate materials
- begin to use basic tools
- find out about past and present events in their own lives and those of others
- find out about their environment
- find out about their own culture and those of others
- find out about beliefs, in particular those of the Christian Faith and the Catholic Church.

Delivery

In Literacy and Numeracy, we are concerned with developing children’s attitudes to learning but also, most importantly, with the acquisition of skills and knowledge. However, in the Early Years, the area of Knowledge and Understanding of the World is much less involved with the accumulation of a body of knowledge or of information and more with the development of an enquiring mind.

The children need to see adults model the inquisitive nature which is fundamental to learning in Science, History, Geography etc.

Adults should model the use of a wide range of appropriate vocabulary for each of the areas of learning under this heading – although it is necessary to use care when considering a balance between “accuracy” and “appropriateness”.

There is a need for a range of practical activities, carefully planned to give opportunities for developing an appropriate level of investigation of the real world, whilst, at the same time, developing an understanding of issues of Health and Safety from a child’s point of view. An example of this is the growing awareness of young children of the need to differentiate between times when it is acceptable to put something in their mouth and an increasing number of times when it is not.

Physical Development

Aims

Children should:

- move with confidence and in safety
- move with control and co-ordination
- show awareness of space
- use a range of small and large equipment
- handle tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control

Delivery

Gross motor skills.

Children need regular planned exercise as part of their everyday experience. Exercise strengthens bones and helps the body to grow and all its systems to work effectively. New learning is taking place and children need time to explore equipment and practise skills before a new skill is introduced. Responding to instructions and having freedom to enjoy space indoors and outdoors may be very new to some children. Children need the opportunity to move to the very limit of their capability in a safe and secure environment.

Fine motor skills.

Children need to experience a range of manipulative actions such as squeezing, rolling, cutting, spreading and grasping. These actions, having been experienced, are refined through working on a smaller scale and choosing a desired outcome and deciding how to achieve it.

The proper use of tools and equipment such as pencils, paintbrushes, scissors etc. needs to be carefully taught so that incorrect or unsafe procedures do not become habitual and thus inhibit further learning and increasing aptitude.

Activities are repeated, re-visited and extended in order to develop increasing control and expertise.

Creative Development

Aims

Children should:

- explore colour, texture, shape, form and space in two and three dimensions
- explore sounds, sound patterns and music
- explore their own imagination
- communicate their ideas through art, design, music and movement

Delivery

Young children's creativity is developed through play – in the same way that adults 'play' with ideas and applications in order to learn something new or become better at something. Play for young children is not mindless and indiscriminate, it is a focused engagement in an activity. Play must therefore be specifically planned to ensure that what may appear to be recreation is actually hard work for the body and the brain.

Personal, Social, Spiritual and Moral Development

Early experience forms the basis of later behaviour and the successful development of the children personally, socially, spiritually and morally can be approached through adherence to a number of principles. These principles involve both rights and responsibilities, both treatment and expectations.

- Adults act as role models, setting high standards of considerate and respectful behaviour towards everyone in the school community which the children will imitate
- Children need to learn how to care for their environment, both the natural world and also resources such as school equipment
- Children perform best when helped to develop control over their own lives
- Children have a right to be heard and for their contributions to be valued
- The children should be involved in cleaning and tidying etc. in order to value clean and well-cared for equipment
- Children will be encouraged in co-operative behaviour when activities are planned to incorporate this end
- A consistency in approach will help the children to feel secure and have an understanding of how the school community works and behaves
- Children operate best when adult intervention is used to avoid allowing them to get drawn into anti-social behaviour and to give praise when they are behaving positively

In all aspects of work in the Early Years, the principle of mutual respect based upon the teachings of Christ and His Church, underpins all that we do. This is our guiding principle throughout St Mary's School.

Equal Opportunities

As in all aspects of school life, the children will be treated at all times with the requirements of equal opportunities in mind. No pupil will be disadvantaged by reason of race, class, gender or ability.

This does not mean that all pupils will necessarily have an identical provision as, for example, those with Special Needs or English as an Additional Language will need to be treated differently. However, all pupils will receive an educational provision which is equally suited to their needs.

Bibliography

Early Years Curriculum and Assessment Handbook – L.B. Greenwich

Early Years Curriculum Documentation – L.B. Bromley

Early Years Curriculum Documentation – L.B. Tower Hamlets

Early Years Policy – Abbey Wood Nursery

Early Years Policy – Deansfield Infants School

Early Years Policy – St Mary's Infants School, Carshalton

Early Years Policy – St William of York School, Forest Hill

Early Learning Goals – QCA

The Core Booklist – CLPE

Language & Learning Magazine



ST. MARY'S R. C. SCHOOL

POLICY DOCUMENT

Early Years