



Early Years Policy

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Our Mission Statement

Love of Learning,
Love of One Another,
Love of the World,
Love of God.

Rationale

“Few things are more important than giving our children the best possible start to their education.” – Ron Dearing.

“It is in that moment of curiosity, puzzlement, effort or interest – the ‘teachable moment’ – that the skilful adult makes a difference”

National Strategies document - Learning, Playing & Interacting.

Young children entering formal education have many years ahead of them in school. It is therefore important to begin this process in a sensitive and caring manner. As a Catholic school we believe that the teachings of Christ are central to everything we do. Following His example we aim to produce a caring environment which enables our new children to settle into school with eagerness and enjoyment and develop a love for learning.

We celebrate the uniqueness of each child who we believe is made in the image of God and we recognise that each individual (child and adult) deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

An Agreed Vision For Early Years Education in a KCSP Academy.

Aims for Early Years Education at St Mary's.

- Practitioners will consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and will use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the Areas of Learning and Development, in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Practitioners will focus strongly on the three Prime Areas (Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, Communication and Language), which are the basis for successful learning in the other four Specific Areas.
- Children will be encouraged to feel included, secure and valued.
- Good home–school links will be supported to give children security and confidence.
- Early education will build on what children already know and can do, encouraging a positive disposition to learning and aiming to achieve early success.
- Children will be offered a carefully structured early years environment which will facilitate their investigations. Children will be free to pursue their own interests and adults will support them and scaffold their learning, guiding their development through warm, positive interaction.
- Children will be offered a well-planned and well-organised environment, in both our inside and outside environment, in which they can have rich and stimulating experiences.
- There will be opportunities for children to engage in activities inspired by the adults in the class and also those that they plan or initiate themselves.
- Practitioners will observe and respond appropriately to children, to inform their knowledge of children's learning and to facilitate the next steps in their learning.
- Focus children will be observed in detail allowing for immediate extension in their understanding, so as to support the child's next steps.

- WOW moments will be recorded (when a child does or says something that demonstrates progress or skill in a particular area) and added to the children's Unique Story.
- Children will receive high-quality care and education, which will encourage effective learning and development of the young children in our care.

We are committed to nurturing positive relationships between adults and children to provide every possible opportunity for them to become confident communicators, to be socially competent, to have high levels of wellbeing and to develop necessary physical skills.

We are committed to nurturing and strengthening partnerships with families to support all areas of children's development and ensure that each child is given every opportunity to achieve their best.

An Agreed Vision For Early Years Education in a KCSP Academy.

Home-school Partnership

We believe in involving parents and carers of new children in their child's education as fully as possible.

We aim to establish an effective partnership based on shared responsibility, understanding and mutual respect and dialogue by:

- creating a welcoming atmosphere in the school;
- providing information about school aims and routines, through the school profile, Class Dojo, early meetings, Home Visits and weekly Headteacher dispatches.
- inviting parents, carers and children for pre-school visits;
- ensuring admission procedures are flexible to allow for children to feel secure and parents and carers to feel confident in the arrangements;
- acknowledging and valuing their role as care givers and early educators
- welcoming help with visits, functions and specific activities in the classroom.

Links with Pre-school Settings.

We pride ourselves in our close relationships with many of the local pre-school settings. In the summer term, members of the Early Years staff are released to visit as many of the new children as possible, in their pre-school settings. This provides an opportunity to observe the children in a familiar environment and also to discuss their general development and any concerns, with the pre-school staff. Towards the end of the summer term a Transition Grid for each child is expected to be received, from their pre-school setting which highlights the child's current level of development. Staff from the pre-schools are invited into school, so that they can see how their children have settled and the progress they have made. Many pre-schools also bring their children in to school to visit us, throughout the year, to familiarise the children with the school environment. Our EYFS teacher also visits local nurseries for storytime sessions.

New Entrants' Evening.

In the summer term parents and carers are invited to a new entrants' evening. The Headteacher and Early Years Phase Leader talk about the transition into school and how we can support both children and their families. Parents and carers are able to talk to their child's teacher and Teaching Assistant in the classroom in which their child will be based. There is an opportunity for the parents and carers to talk about their child's specific needs and to ask questions and clear up any worries they may have, our school Additional Educational Needs Co-ordinator will be there to discuss any individual needs and questions. The Parents and Friends Association are available to talk about their work to raise money for the school and local suppliers of school uniforms have a display. A representative of the Governing Body is also available for parents and carers to talk to. A uniform supplier will also be present.

Child School Visits

We send a welcome letter to each child, to invite them to spend Stay and Play sessions in school, during the summer term. They also receive a photo book, from our class bears, showing them around the class as well as the wider school. The children are also invited to come along to a Teddy Bears' Picnic. This gives them an opportunity to get to know their teacher and teaching assistant through multiple visits. The child can become familiarised with the organisation of the classroom and other essential areas such as cloakrooms, toilets etc.

Parents and carers are encouraged to stay for a coffee morning, kindly hosted by our PFA, meeting up with others whose children will be starting school at the same time. Second-hand uniform will be available to purchase.

In the first week of the September term the teachers make home visits. This allows the teachers to see the children in their own environment, which can make them feel more settled. During the visit the teacher will discuss any concerns that parents and carers may have.

Admission Procedures

Staggered start

Children will start on a part time basis during the first week of term. Initially the children stay for just the morning session. The morning is then extended to include lunch and playtime on the school playground, after this the children begin school full time.

This arrangement allows the teacher and teaching assistant to build relationships with the children, really getting to know them individually. Individual timetables can be discussed as necessary; however, it is our policy to admit all children to full time education in Term 1 of the academic year in which they reach the age of five years. Starting school for the first time brings with it new routines, social situations and experiences which can be very exhausting, even if a child has been at nursery full time.

Settling-in

The day will be organised to maximise periods of sustained, uninterrupted play to encourage in-depth exploration.

Through joint discussions between parents, carers and staff it can be decided whether a child needs extra time to settle in or whether they are ready to begin full-time education after the initial period.

EYFS children go in to lunch earlier than the other children. This enables staff to stay with the children in the lunch hall, to encourage conversation, table manners and to explain the choice of food and help with the serving of lunch. The EYFS children have a dedicated adult with Paediatric First Aid training who remains with them whilst they eat their lunch.

Health and Safety

We follow the school's guidelines on health and safety.

The teachers welcome the children into school in the mornings and the children remain with their class staff at the end of each day. The staff will only dismiss each child when a parent collects them, or a person previously authorised by the parent.

Both the class teacher and teaching assistant have Paediatric First Aid training. When children are eating, they will be supervised by at least one adult with Paediatric First Aid training.

Monitoring, Assessment and Record-keeping.

Children are assessed on entry to school, through Baseline Assessment.

We follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised, Department for Education validated phonics programme. At the end of each term the children's phonic knowledge data is updated. We also assess the children's numeracy skills.

At the end of the Reception Year the children are assessed against the Early Learning Goals. The Foundation Stage Profile is completed at the end of the academic year, which gives information on individual pupils. It is used to inform school improvement planning and to promote the continuity of learning into Year 1.

My Unique Story Books (or as we call them, Clever Books) are kept for every child. The children and staff update these books regularly and enjoy leafing through them together. They are regularly updated with information from assessments, WOW moments and Focus Child Weeks.

Each child is a Focus Child within each long term. Following these weeks feedback is passed on to parents and carers about their child's progress and development, explaining to parents and carers the children's next steps that they need to take in their learning.

We recognise that children learn and develop in different ways, at different rates and that they bring diverse experiences to our academies.

Children with Additional Needs.

We use the procedures as outlined in the Additional Educational Needs policy (identification, intervention, planning, support, recording, review and early referral to agencies).

Where necessary meetings with and advice from outside agencies, such as the educational psychologist, welfare officer, health visitor, speech therapist and the Pre-school Advisory Service will be arranged. Our admissions arrangements are flexible and will be tailored to meeting the requirements of individual children with diverse needs.

Outdoor learning.

At St Mary's we view access to our outdoor environment as an integral part of our children's daily learning. Effective provision and knowledgeable adults are able to support the children and facilitate their learning across all seven areas of the EYFS Framework. In depth conversations and sustained shared thinking enable us to provide opportunities for exploration, movement, creativity and independent learning. Adults provide support and the next steps in children's learning immediately. They then step back to allow the children time to practice, refine and perfect their learning.

Young children learn differently outside:

They move more freely.

They take greater risks.

They explore physically, enabling themselves to test ideas.

They collaborate, persevere and play together.

Most activities are STEM based.

Outdoor learning opportunities are different to those inside the classroom. They are bigger, messier, more physical and children feel that they have true ownership of their learning.

Screen Time.

Evidence shows that screens can have a big impact on children and their development in the early years. Screen use should be ... limited to up to an hour a day for children aged 2 to 5. You should take a precautionary approach to using screens in your setting by limiting screen use for children and only use it carefully and intentionally, for specific learning and development aims. Restricting time children spend on screens at home and in early years settings supports healthy child development, which requires sufficient sleep, play, real-world interaction and responsive adult engagement.

DFE- Screen Use. 2026

Screen time refers to the amount of time a child spends looking at a screen. Screen use refers to how, why and in what context screens are used.

At St Mary's we carefully consider the nature of any content that we plan to use on a screen, to ensure it is safe and age appropriate. We plan to only use screens to enhance teaching points. Screens are not used for routine management or to calm children, as this impacts on children's ability to learn to self-regulate. Screens are not used to just occupy children or manage their behaviour, only to enhance learning within the classroom.

All digital content is:

- checked to ensure it is suitable for early years children, prior to showing it to the children
- slow-paced, repetitive and predictable - avoiding fast-paced, over-stimulating content - this includes content which has a lot of cuts, movement and flashing on screen, complex audio with lots of fast-talking characters or overlapping music and dialogue, or complex plots
- advert-free, as young children cannot discern between advertisements and other content
- free of scrolling and autoplay features, to ensure children are not inadvertently exposed to inappropriate content or able to access content for longer than planned use - this includes algorithm-driven content, such as video platforms

Using screens in our setting.

Screen use is limited, carefully planned and clearly linked to intended learning aims, supporting teaching. It does not displace important activities such as physical activity, time outdoors, story time, and engagement with other children and adults. Screens do not replace high quality educator-child interactions, as direct human interaction provides a much richer experience for children. Adults co-engage with children, prompting them to think, predict, respond or discuss.

Story and song time is one of our favourite times of the day at St Mary's. A story, nursery rhyme or song on a screen cannot match one told and performed by an engaged adult who makes eye contact with the children, uses different voices and facial expressions, and changes pace, volume and emphasis in response to children's reactions.

In our EYFS classroom we have a teacher's Interactive Whiteboard that is used to supplement lessons. We also have a class PC which children are able to access. Children's time on the PC is limited to a timed ten minutes. The children are only able to access educational Purple Mash activities. There is no facility for them to access the internet. There is no autoplay feature or adverts.

We teach children about our technologically diverse world by talking to them in an age-appropriate way about different types of technology and how to use them safely.

Our play based, child-initiated activities are screen-free. Calm instrumental music, from advert free sites, is sometimes played in the background during child-initiated time.

- children do not view screens in a passive or sedentary way, without any interaction or communication from staff
- screens are only used with children for short periods at a time, to protect their ability to focus and concentrate
- screens are not playing in the background, as they can distract from activities such as social interaction and active play