



Early Years Policy

Reviewed: Summer 2026

Next review: Summer 2028

This policy has been reviewed and determined by
The Local Governing Committee

23rd March 2026

Live, love and learn in God's Name

Our mission at St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School is underpinned by the Gospel Values.

We **LIVE** the Gospel Values and shine our light for others around the world.

We **LOVE** each other as Jesus does and celebrate our unique and diverse school community.

We **LEARN** to follow spiritually in Jesus' footsteps and know that he guides us in all we do.

At St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School we believe pupils make progress when outstanding behaviour creates a climate where lessons are entirely focused on learning. We achieve this by inspiring, motivating and challenging our pupils.

"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." (DfE, 2017)

Our Aims and Principles

We believe that children's experiences in the Foundation Stage are crucial in developing confidence, health and well being and a positive foundation for lifelong learning. We therefore aim to promote and support the four key principles of the EYFS as described below:

- 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.
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

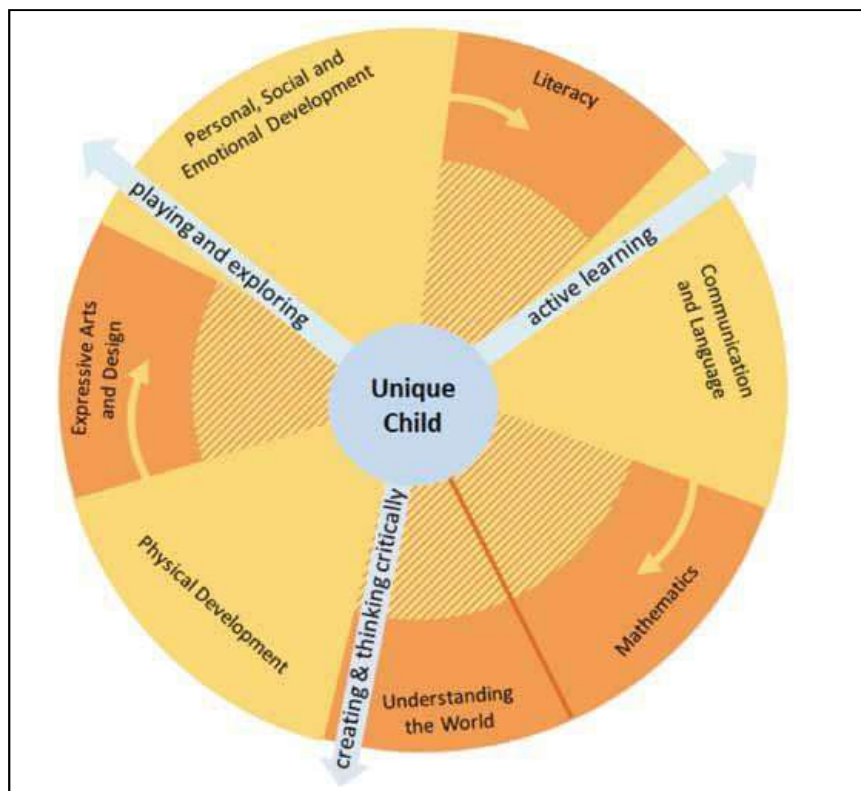
To achieve this we will:

- Endeavor to develop positive attitudes towards one another, through our teaching and by example; living out the Mission Statement of our Catholic school.
- Ensure that all children and their families feel safe, valued, included and respected.
- Promote parents as partners in their child's learning.
- Promote a safe, challenging, rich and varied indoor and outdoor learning environment.
- Provide children with the opportunities to develop their characteristics of effective learning that includes: **Play and Exploring, Active Learning and Creative and thinking critically.**
- Ensure all seven areas of the EYFS are given equal coverage and that planning is based on observations of children, their interests and their next steps in learning.

The Curriculum

At St Mary Star of the Sea we follow the non-statutory guidelines 'Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)' The curriculum is divided into seven areas of learning. Three prime learning areas which are: **Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication and Language** and **Physical Development**. Four specific learning areas: **Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World** and **Expressive Arts and Design**. Within each area, children develop through different ages and stages. The Early Learning Goals, are the national expectations for children at the end of the Reception year (and Foundation Stage.) **The Characteristics of Effective Learning, (Play and Exploring, Active Learning and Creative and thinking critically)** the Prime and Specific Areas of Learning and Development are all interconnected. Details of the areas of learning from the EYFS and a summary of what each of them mean for children's development can be found in 'Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)' produced by Department of Education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>



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

- The **prime** areas begin to develop quickly in response to relationships and experiences, and run through and support learning in all other areas. The prime areas continue to be fundamental throughout the EYFS.

- The **specific** areas include essential skills and knowledge. They grow out of the prime areas, and provide important contexts for learning.

The Unique Child reaches out to relate to people and things through the **Characteristics of Effective Learning**, which move through all areas of learning.

- playing and exploring
- active learning
- creating and thinking critically

Prime areas are fundamental, work together, and move through to support development in all other areas.

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

Specific areas include essential skills and knowledge for children to participate successfully in society.

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

Assessment, Recording and Monitoring

At St Mary Star of the Sea, we undertake assessment for learning. We analyse and review what we know about each child's development and learning and then make informed decisions about the child's progress. This enables us to plan the next steps to meet their development and learning needs. All practitioners who interact with the child contribute to the assessment process.

Within the Reception class we use two types of assessment:

- **Formative assessment:** This type of assessment informs everyday planning and is based on continual observational assessment of each child's achievements, interests and learning styles.
Formative assessment may take the form of anecdotal observations, focused observations and other focused assessments e.g. sound/number, annotated examples of work, photographs, video and information from parents. Each child has an individual Learning Journey book, in which this evidence is stored. We plan for observational assessment when undertaking our medium and short term planning. All of these assessments are recorded using Target Tracker and a regular report is sent to parents.
- **Summative assessment:** At the beginning of the year the national reception baseline is completed. This assessment is designed to be taken by pupils during their first half term in reception. All pupils should be assessed within the first 6 weeks of joining reception, regardless of when they join the class, if they have not been previously assessed. The purpose of the reception baseline assessment is to provide an on-entry assessment of pupil attainment to be used as a starting point from which to measure progress to the end of key stage 2 (KS2). At the end of the Reception year the EYFS Profile is completed, which provides information of a child's knowledge, understanding and their progress. The Profile reflects the on-going observations and assessments which have been made during the year. Evaluations are made in each of the 7 areas of learning, assessing against the early learning goals criteria. Each child will be assessed as either 'on track' or 'not on track' in each of the 7 areas of learning. This informs the Year One teacher and supports transition from Development Matters to the National Curriculum.

Teaching and Learning is monitored by the subject leaders through lesson observations, pupil voice and whole school work scrutiny. The Senior Leadership Team monitor teaching and learning across the Foundation Stage throughout the year and analyse the EYFS Profile data. There is also a specific EYFS Governor who monitors EYFS across the year.

Learning through Play

At St Mary Star of the Sea, we do not make a distinction between work and play. We support children's learning through planned play activities, and decide when child-initiated or adult-led play activities would provide the most effective learning opportunities.

The Learning Environment

We create attractive, welcoming and stimulating learning environments which will encourage children to explore, investigate and learn through firsthand experience.

We also make it a place where children feel secure and confident, and are challenged to develop their independence. Activities are planned for both the inside and outside; children have the freedom to move between the indoor and outdoor classroom throughout the school day. The learning environment is divided into different zones in order to fully support all seven areas of learning. Children are encouraged to become independent learners and to take some responsibility for initiating their own lines of enquiry and investigation.

St Mary Star of the Sea

EARLY YEARS Assessment and planning

Observations

Continuous observation assessment will form a view of where each child is in their learning journey, where they need to go, and the most effective practice to support getting there. We use:

On the spot and focused:

- Sticker/post-it observations
- Photos
- Checklist
- Group work
- Individual work
- Electronic observations

Planning and provision.

Next steps and learning gaps inform planning. The planning reflects children's development needs, interests and class topic/book. Provision is planned for indoors and outdoors covering the 7 areas of learning. There are opportunities for children to self-select resources and a chance to free flow between areas.

Topic letters are sent home at the beginning of every term, so parents have the opportunity to be involved with supporting their children's learning. Reception children are expected to read at home daily with parents.

EYFS Assessment Tracking

All the observations are collected for each child. This evidence informs our assessments of the children's abilities and achievements. In reception it is recorded on the class-tracking grid.

To support this judgment, we consider how often we have observed the child? Are they doing it independently? Are they sharing their learning with peers? Do they truly understand?

Next Steps

Using the 'Development Matters' EYFS and the Data Grid it is easy to identify if a child is not making progress. We need to ask why? Have we planned for a target that is not developmentally appropriate? Is our provision enabling this child to achieve? Are we offering enough opportunities for the children to be able to access equipment, activities and adults to enable them to progress?

We may plan intervention group work or even individual support to aid rapid progress being made in any areas of learning.

The main aim is that all children will be given the best opportunity to achieve a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) by the end of the year.

Learning Journey

Photographic evidence and examples of work are gathered to evidence their progress and show enjoyment of different activities across the 7 areas of learning. This can be evidence from school or home. These are annotated and linked to the 'Development Matters' EYFS 2023 to show how they are achieving and progressing.

Parents can contribute to the learning journey by filling in WOW slips. Parents are encouraged to share learning journeys with their children during parent consultations and 'Parent Open Afternoon sessions'.

Unique Child Data Grids

Once a term, each child's achievements are recorded on a whole class data grid. This grid will state if a child is on track or not on track in the learning areas and will identify which age bracket they are working within. At a glance the grid will show each child's progress. We use this to monitor progress and to highlight gaps within our provision.

Liaison with Pre-School Settings and Induction

At St Mary Star of the Sea, children transfer from various local preschools. The reception practitioner utilises the transfer records from pre-school settings to inform them about each new intake. During the Summer Term, the EYFS teacher visits the feeder nurseries and play groups, to meet the children in a familiar setting. In addition, all prospective children have the opportunity to visit the school and their classroom for a 'taster' sessions. In the second half of the summer term, parents attend an information evening which introduces them to the school's key personnel and its procedures and practices. Outside agencies also attend as part of the information sharing practice.

During the Autumn Term, the EYFS teacher undertake home visits. Children are inducted in a staggered entry, beginning with half days, half days with lunch and eventually full days. This also gives the children the opportunity to get to know their new class mates, surroundings and staff in a gentle and gradual way. Children attend school full-time and are all present by the end of the second week of the new academic term.

Reception to Year 1 Transition

Reception and Year 1 work together to make the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 as smooth as possible.

At St Mary Star of the Sea:

- Children are encouraged to develop independence when dressing and undressing and when organising their personal belongings throughout the Reception year.
- Reception practitioners plan for more structured activities to be undertaken during the summer terms, encouraging less dependence on adult support.
- Reception children meet Year 1 staff regularly during the summer term.
- EYFS Profile/Characteristics of Effective Learning is passed on to the Year 1 teacher.
- Reception and Year 1 teacher meet to discuss individual needs of children in July.
- Reception children visit their new Year 1 class and teacher for a 'taster' session in July.
- The 'Little Wandle' approach to phonics and reading is continued throughout Year 1 and 2.
- There is an overlap in approach and routines, e.g. behaviour systems, timetables, etc.
- The Year 1 children continue to enjoy independent learning experiences which gradually become more formalised towards the end of the academic year.

Home School Links

We recognise that parents are the child's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early year's settings, the results have a positive impact on the child's development. A successful partnership needs to be a two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise.

We develop this by:

- Outlining the Reception curriculum to parents during the new parents' meeting in July, to enable them to understand the value of supporting

their child's learning at home.

- Sending home topic letters at the beginning of each term outlining focus areas and activities that can be done at home.
- Operating an "open door" policy, whereby parents can come and discuss concerns and developments in an informal manner.
- Creating opportunities for 'Parent Open Afternoons,' where parents can come during school hours to share learning with their children and look at their Learning Journeys.
- Sharing progress at school and encouraging parents to comment through 'WOW' slips progress noticed at home.
- Encouraging parents to listen to their child read each night and to comment on reading progress in a home/school contact book.
- Providing an annual written report to parents in July summarizing the child's progress against the early learning goals and EYFS assessment scales and giving an outline of their child's Characteristics of Effective Learning.

Equal Opportunities

At St Mary Star of the Sea we provide all pupils, regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties, disabilities, gender or ability, equal access to all aspects of school life and work to ensure that every child is valued fully as an individual. Practitioners, as role models, are aware of the influence of adults in promoting positive attitudes and use that influence to challenge stereotypical ideas.

Inclusion

Children with additional educational needs will be given support as appropriate to enable them to benefit from the curriculum. This includes children that are more able, and those with specific learning difficulties and disabilities. Additional adult support may be provided for children with special needs, thus increasing the adult/pupil ratio. The school's SEN coordinator is responsible for providing additional information and advice to practitioners and parents, and for arranging external intervention and support where necessary.

Safeguarding and Welfare

"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."
(DfE, 2017)

At St Mary Star of the Sea we provide a welcoming, safe, secure and stimulating environment enabling all children to develop into independent and confident individuals.

Please also refer to the Safeguarding Policy and Health and Safety Policy

