



## St John's Primary School Early Years Policy

### Rationale

At St John's we aim to provide the highest quality care and education for all our children thereby giving them a solid foundation for their future learning. We create a safe and happy environment with motivating and enjoyable learning experiences that enable children to become confident and independent. We value the individual child and work alongside parents and others to meet their needs and help every child to reach their full potential.

### Aims and Objectives

We adhere to the Statutory Framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the four guiding principles that shape practice within Early Years settings.

- 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 with teaching and support from adults**, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- **Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates**

#### **As part of our practice we:**

- Provide a balanced curriculum, based on the EYFS, across the seven areas of learning (Personal, Social & Emotional, Communication & Language, Physical Development, Literacy, Maths, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design), using play and guided activities as the vehicle for learning.
- Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. We provide early intervention for those children who require additional support.
- Work in partnership with parents and within the wider context.
- Plan challenging learning experiences based on the individual child, informed by observation and assessment.
- Provide opportunities for children to engage in activities that are adult-initiated and child-initiated, supported by the adult.
- Have a key person approach to develop close relationships with individual children.
- Provide a secure and safe learning environment indoors and out.

### Early Years Curriculum

The Nature of Learning: -

Children learn through play. Play is a child's work and provides vital foundations for future learning. Play is the medium through which the Early Years Curriculum is experienced by children. It is a serious business since it demands from the children concentration, perseverance, and mental and physical effort.

Young children learn by experience. They need to look, touch, smell, listen, taste and explore with a variety of play materials. Within the group, all children are supported in developing their potential at their own pace. By means of developmentally appropriate

activities and adult support, the curriculum leads to Early Learning Goals and prepares children to progress with confidence towards life in school.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning and the Prime and Specific Areas of learning and development are all interconnected. The ways in which a 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.

## **Prime Area**

### **Personal, Social and Emotional**

We see this area as of paramount importance, within a secure and stimulating environment children are supported in developing self-esteem and the confidence to work, co-operate, and establish relationships with others in a group outside the family.

The children are encouraged to:

- Make and express choices
- Demonstrate independence in selecting activities and resources
- Explore new learning
- Take control and responsibility for their actions and needs
- Use initiative and their developing powers of reasoning to solve the problems they encounter in their work
- Develop the perseverance to engage increasingly complex play, working sometimes independently and at other times collaboratively with increasing concentration.
- With support, begin to take responsibility for their self-care, including using the toilet, hand washing and understanding the importance of oral hygiene.

The same problem-solving approach applies to areas of social conflict where children are supported in verbalising their feelings, acknowledging, and respecting the needs of others and working towards mutually acceptable solutions so that they develop an understanding of both themselves and the part they play in a group and of what is right, wrong, and why. Adult examples and support, activities, stories, and the sharing of experiences help to develop an understanding of a range of feelings and care for all living things, property, and the environment. The children are introduced to concepts of sharing, caring, honesty, relationships, kindness, feeling and empathy.

### **Communication and Language**

Children are encouraged to extend their vocabulary, fluency and listening skills by hearing, participating in having fun with and responding to stories, songs, and rhymes, some of which they will commit to memory. Vocabulary is carefully planned and repeated across the week in play and guided sessions to extend children's knowledge of words.

Children talk with others about personally meaningful experiences in small group sessions to improve their oracy. They reflect on their play during that day and plan their play for the rest of the day.

Children learn to communicate with others positively during the day and to describe events, objects and relationships when evaluating their learning. Activities in small and large groups familiarise children with the pattern and rhythm of language and introduce them letter and sound recognition. Through a variety of opportunities, they learn to listen to each other's contributions and learn to play co-operatively. During role-play,

the children develop language skills by using different modes and styles of speaking for different people and situations.

For the children who need additional support with their speech and language skills we provide a range of interventions that involve 1:1, or small group support tailored to the child. All staff with Early Years are aware of the children that are identified as needing additional support with their communication and provide opportunities for talk, targeted at these pupils during play. Teachers and Teaching Assistants are trained in how to develop children's language skills.

### **Physical Development**

A range of large and small equipment and opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, allow children to develop confidence and enjoyment in the use and development of their own physical skills. Adult support enables children to safely meet physical challenges, developing increasing skill, co-ordination, and control in moving, climbing, and balancing. At the same time, children are supported in the development of the fine motor skills required to use tools such as brushes, pencils, and scissors, to handle small objects with increasing control and precision and to choose the correct tool for the job. Children explore a variety of manipulative toys, which develop manual dexterity by slotting, pushing, pressing, and threading.

### **Specific Areas**

#### **Writing**

In an environment rich in print and opportunities to write, our goal is to help children to understand the power of the written word as a basis for communication, knowledge acquisition and entertainment and, when they are ready, to encourage children to use written and drawn symbols for themselves in drawing, letter-like forms, invented spellings, dictated stories and emergent writing. A variety of mark-making implements for drawing and writing are offered to the children and they are encouraged to draw and write about things which interest them and which they want to communicate. Mark-making is an especially important and necessary stage in the development of early literacy. Emergent writing is positively encouraged so that children learn to communicate in the written form. Every child's work is valued and respected. The children are encouraged to use mark-making tools in all areas of the unit, such as shopping lists, letters, and notes. We encourage and help to transfer spoken language into the written form. The level of writing is matched to each child's ability. This also includes scribing for the children to enable them to compose at length. As the children gain in competence, their random marks become more precise, left to right orientation becomes apparent and their writing begins to contain recognisable letters.

Children who are beginning to write independently are supported in their attempts by helping them to discriminate the initial letter sound of the work required. As competence increases, they are encouraged to discriminate and represent further sounds in these words. Children whose finer motor skills need a lot of input are encouraged to use fat crayons, paints, clay, dough, and small manipulative toys to develop finer muscle tone in their fingers. The children are introduced to the correct formation of each letter from the beginning, and this is developed by practice of individual letter formation. Writing is practised in the air, on paper, in sand, with paints, on white boards and is developed indoors and outdoors.

From an early age, children are supported to write following initial Read Write Inc sessions. This begins formally in the third term during nursery and from the beginning of the year in reception. Children practise handwriting every day with support. They are

provided with books with plain paper for early formation and then wide lines when they begin to learn about size and relative position. Age-appropriate tools are selected, such as sharp pencils with triangular grips which help beginner writers. All children in reception practise sitting in a comfortable and stable position for handwriting practice.

## Reading

We encourage our children to love and respect books. Every day, a member of staff will share books with the whole class and at other times with individuals or small groups as required. We share a range of text types including traditional tales, poetry, factual books, picture books, and stories that follow the children's interests. We help the children to develop pre-reading skills by touching each word as it is read, enabling the children to match the spoken to the written word and to follow print in the correct direction. The children are encouraged to use picture clues and to predict events. We discuss the content of the books to ensure understanding. All these activities help the children to discover the relationship between the spoken and the written word. They discover words and pictures have meaning and discover rhymes, rhythms, and patterns of words.

We run a Take Home Library where the children can look at books and choose their favourite story to take home to share with their parent/carer. We believe that storytelling and book reading is an effective way for parents/carers to have regular, additional talking time with their children. Parents are welcomed into school for our 'Hooks into books' morning once per half term and the children are presented with a new book to take home and keep, enabling them to build a library of books to share at home.

Storytelling introduces structure and language patterns that help form the building blocks for reading and writing skills. Reading to children daily gives them the best start in life. In our Early Years the children take part in Early Reading Skills, Read Write Inc and Talk for Writing to support independent reading.

### Early reading skills.

The activities are adult led with the intention of teaching young children important skills: listening, sound discrimination, rhythm and rhyme, alliteration, voice sounds, oral blending, and segmenting. When the children are ready, they move onto Read Write Inc where they are taught letters and sounds.

### Read Write Inc

Read Write Inc developed by Ruth Miskin, provides a structured and systematic approach to teaching literacy. It is designed to create fluent readers, confident speakers, and willing writers. The Read Write Inc programme is used to teach phonics to children who are learning to read. The programme is well structured and quickly gets children blending the phonemes they have been taught to make words.

### Talk for Writing

Talk for Writing developed by Pie Corbett is an approach to teaching writing that emphasises three teaching methods:

- Imitation, where children learn stories by heart, so they can discuss and dissect them.
- Innovation, where children adapt stories to create their own versions.
- Invention, where teachers help pupils to create original stories.

These tasks aim to improve writing ability by giving children an understanding of the structure and elements of written language.

## **Maths**

Mathematics enters every area of the Early Years, and the development of mathematical concepts are happening all the time. Through their play and by means of adult-supported practical experiences children become familiar with sorting, matching, ordering, sequencing, recognising, and creating patterns and counting everyday objects.

Elements of the daily routine such as preparing snacks, counting those present, number games, songs, rhymes, and number-related activities such as jigsaw puzzles help children recognise and use numbers to 10 (and beyond, where appropriate). Children use their developing mathematical understanding to solve practical problems and their developing mathematical vocabulary to describe shape, position, size and quantity, simple addition and subtraction, doubling, halving, and sharing. Early mathematical concepts are developed such as sorting, matching, colour, shape, size, and number.

Reception follow The White Rose Scheme of Learning - building a culture of deep understanding, confidence, and competence in maths – a culture that produces strong, secure learning and real progress. No matter what their starting points this way of teaching maths really supports and allows children to reason and embed their knowledge.

## **Understanding the World**

A safe and stimulating environment allows children to explore and experiment with a wide range of natural and manufactured materials. They learn to observe, talk, and ask questions about and sometimes record features of objects and substances and to recognise differences, patterns, similarities, and change. Children are assisted both indoors and outdoors in exploring and understanding their environment, their families, and past and present events in their own lives. They explore, care for, and recognise features of living things, e.g., in the garden and with visiting animals.

The children explore a range of found materials. They are involved in planning and decision making, cutting, placing, fixing, and fastening. Language skills are developed as children talk about what they have made. At times they are asked to make something to meet given criteria. They can explore a full range of materials and to select the most appropriate materials and make their desired model. They are encouraged to test their work and amend and improve as appropriate.

We aim to give the children the experience of as many techniques concerned with the safe preparation of food as possible, such as stirring, chopping, grating, mixing, rolling, and squeezing. Everyone can smell, feel, taste the foods, and observe the scientific changes when foods are beaten, frozen, baked and mixed together.

Children will have opportunities to access technology such as iPads, PCs and an interactive whiteboard in each classroom. There is a range of programmes to enable the children to develop hand/eye co-ordination leading to fundamental keyboard skills. Our programmes allow the children to draw and paint pictures and engage in early reading and numeracy activities.

## **Expressive Arts and Design**

Children are encouraged to use their senses and a wide range of resources to express their own ideas and feelings and to construct their individual responses in two and three dimensions. A wide range of art equipment, as well as natural and recycled

resources provide for open-ended exploration of colour, shape and texture and the development of skills in painting, drawing and collage.

Children join in with and respond to music, dance and stories and there are many opportunities for exploration and self-expression. In addition to this, music sessions led by a specialist teacher help children to learn about pitch, tone, and rhythm.

The learning environment provides stimulating props for imaginative role-play, both independently and alongside peers. During adult led teaching, drama techniques, drawn from the Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching, generate imaginative, purposeful, and engaging activities for learning.

### **Forest School**

The aim of forest school is to provide regular opportunities for all children to learn outdoors in a woodland setting. Children take part in positive learning experiences, where they will develop self-confidence and self-esteem. These activities can be self-chosen where the children can follow their own interests as well as taking part in guided sessions such as identifying trees, birds, flora, and fauna, making fires, using tools, and getting muddy! Forest school sessions bring learning to life and encourage the children to reflect and review their learning, take risks, and become independent. Forest school is a positive experience for both children and adults and our aims are for all children to have fun, learn and build on their experiences.

The Forest School leader will ensure that safety checks have been completed on the site of each visit as well as carrying out a risk assessment prior to the visit. The Forest School Leader will ensure any adults taking part in the session will be fully aware of safety procedures and policies. There will be a qualified first aider present during forest school trips.

It is important that all children have appropriate clothing suitable for all weather conditions. The school will provide waterproof jackets, trousers, and high-viz fluorescent vests. Regardless of the weather all children are expected to wear long sleeves, long trousers, and strong shoes. This will protect them from the sun, stinging plants etc. Wellies should be worn on wet days. Sun hats are necessary for sunny days.

The Forest School Leader will ensure the Forest School programme is progressive and take time to reflect on and evaluate each session with the children and adults who are present. From these evaluations it will help future planning building on the children interests and prior knowledge.

### **Planning**

All staff are committed to planning as a team around the needs and interests of the children.

### **Long Term Plans**

Long term planning provides a strong framework for working with 3–5-year-olds. We base our plans on the Early Years Curriculum, with reference to Development Matters. This is the over-arching framework that informs all others stages of planning. It shows the range of experiences/learning opportunities that are available whilst the children are in Early Years. A long-term plan is a way of ensuring that all seven areas of learning are given equal emphasis and that all aspects of learning within the seven areas are covered regularly and frequently.

## Short Term Plans

Short term planning is based on the long term plan and developed using ongoing observations and informal assessment of the children. It is usually drawn up on a weekly basis. It includes, for example, sequences of experiences and activities designed to promote new learning or to consolidate or apply recent learning. Observations of the children are considered and planning is adjusted to cater for the interests and needs of the children and to capitalise on unplanned events, particularly those initiated by the children.

## **Observation and Assessment**

As part of our daily practice, we observe and assess children's development and learning to inform future planning. We record our observations in a variety of ways. Everyone is encouraged to contribute, and discussions take place both informally and during a formal weekly planning meeting. Significant observations of children's achievements are collated in their own personal learning journey on Seesaw, which is shared with parents.

Within the final term of school, we provide the parents with a report based on their child's development against Development Matters and each of the Early Learning Goals. The parents are then given the opportunity to discuss the children's achievements with the class teacher.

## Assertive Mentoring Meetings

Every term we hold an Assertive Mentoring meeting with the children in our Early Years and their parent/carer. Assertive Mentoring outcomes and targets show what a child can do, and what they need to do to move to the next stage of learning. The process allows teachers to set achievable targets each term, and to work with the children to complete these. This then enables us to share these targets with parents/carers so that they can help their child to achieve even more quickly. During the meeting we share the children's progress, celebrating what they can already do.

## **Seesaw**

Seesaw is an online platform we use to record the development of each child in our setting. This system allows us to work with parents and carers to share information and record the children's play and learning both inside and outside of the setting. Parents are encouraged to spend time with their child looking at the photos of their learning at school together. The documented learning on seesaw builds a portfolio of achievements and is valued by the children, staff, and parents.

## **Equal Opportunities**

The school's purpose is to deliver a well-planned, balanced, and appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of all children. We have high expectations of all our children and provide them with quality learning experiences covering all aspects of the curriculum. These are irrespective of race, gender, class, or disability. The school's ethos supports the development of cultural and personal identities and prepares our children for full participation in society. Every child needs to achieve success to develop a positive self-image. We recognise that all our children, including those with special educational needs, require a scaffolded approach for them to have access to the whole curriculum and reach their potential. It is the responsibility of all members of staff and the SENCO to ensure that teaching strategies, resources and support are appropriate to the needs of everyone. The school policy is to provide special needs

support earlier rather than later. This means staff are aware of the importance of any special needs as the result of early assessment and intervention.

### **Role of the parents**

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

- Inviting all parents to visit our setting during the term before their child starts school.
- Offering parents regular opportunities to talk about their child's progress encouraging parents to talk to the child's teacher if there are any concerns.
- Arranging for a staggered start to Nursery and Reception over the first two weeks of term, so that the teacher can welcome each child individually into our school.
- Encouraging parents to stay if there are problems with the child's admission.
- Offering a range of activities, throughout the year, that encourages collaboration between child, school and parents i.e., Open days and workshops.

### **Safety**

Children's safety and welfare is paramount. We have a safe, secure environment, and provide a curriculum which teaches children how to be safe, make choices and assess risks. We have stringent policies, procedures, and documents in place to ensure children's safety.

We promote the good health of the children in our care in numerous ways, including the provision of nutritious food, following set procedures when children become ill or have an accident.

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Next Review September 2025