



The Catholic Federation of English Martyrs, Oakham & St Augustine's Stamford Catholic Voluntary Academies

Early Years Policy

Aims and Objectives

Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. Early Years education is a vitally important stage in itself and not just the preparation for the next stage. This policy outlines the purpose, nature and management of early years education at English Martyrs and St Augustines Primary Academies.

Using the guidance of the Early Years framework we aim to provide : -

quality and consistency so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind

a secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly;

partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers;

equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.

Teaching and Learning

There are seven areas of learning within the Early Years curriculum.

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. These three areas, the *prime* areas, are:

- communication and language;
- physical development;
- personal, social and emotional development.

Providers must also support children in four *specific* areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The specific areas are:

- literacy;
- mathematics;
- understanding the world;
- expressive arts and design.

Each area of learning and development is implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others. We believe that children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults.

Through topic work, carefully selected resources and a wide range of activities all areas of learning are covered. We encourage the children to become involved in their own learning and development. Our planning for each topic area is done in collaboration with the children; we find out what they already know about the topic and then encourage them to think about what they would like to know and find out. This helps them to take ownership of their learning and also of the learning environment.

Children learn at different speeds and in a variety of different ways so a wide range of teaching strategies are employed within the classroom to ensure that all children make progress. We aim to create a balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities within the classroom to help build children's confidence, self-esteem and independence.

As children grow older, and as their development allows, the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1. In our planning we look at the different ways that children learn and reflect these in our practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go';
- **active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements;
- **creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Assessment

The children are carefully observed and monitored from their first day in Early years so that each child's individual interests and needs are fully met. If necessary children are supported through our special education needs program and our Gifted and Talented provision.

We use the information passed from their previous setting and our own baseline assessment to initially assess the children on entry and then formally assess their progress 3 more times during the academic year before making a final judgement against the early learning goals.

Informally we assess the children continually and all children have a Learning Journey where observations, photographs and examples of their work are placed. The Learning Journeys are used to inform our planning and as an assessment tool when completing each child's EYFS Profile.

The Learning Environment

"Children are born ready, able and eager to learn. They actively reach out to interact with other people, and in the world around them.

Development is not an automatic process, it depends on each unique child having opportunities to interact in positive relationships and enabling environments."

(development matters in the early years foundation stage document 2012)

Well planned, purposeful play, both indoors and outdoors, is the foundation of development and learning for young children. Children learn in a variety of ways: watching others, talking, asking questions, listening, exploring and investigating. Learning through play is both enjoyable and challenging and helps children to develop intellectually, creatively, physically, socially and emotionally.

Our learning environments provide the opportunity for children to access all of areas of the Early Years curriculum. Although the classrooms are divided up into specific learning areas, they are all interconnected and there is free flow of children and resources between the areas. The children are encouraged to access resources independently. The learning environment is closely linked to the topic being covered and so resources are frequently changed to help provide challenge, stimulation and freshness.

We have direct access to an outdoor area and children are encouraged from the very start to see this area as an extension of our classroom. This area gives the children a space to develop different ways of playing outside of the normal restrictions of the classroom.

The children also have access to other learning environments as well as their immediate classroom which include a hall, a large playground area, academy field, vegetable boxes, wild area and an on site orienteering trail. We also plan off site visits to local places of interest especially to begin a new topic or help to develop a role play area for the children. The children access swimming in term 5 and forest academy in term 6.

All these opportunities provide further scope to challenge and stimulate the children.

The Role of Adults in the Foundation Stage

Within the Early years classroom there are at least two members of staff at all times. One is the classroom teacher and the other is a teaching assistant.

The classroom teacher is responsible for the long term planning, but the classroom teacher and the teaching assistant meet frequently throughout the year to carry out medium and short term planning and resourcing the learning environment. It is important that this is done together as it is vital that the adults working within the foundation stage have a clear understanding of where the children are and where they need to go.

All the Early Years staff have a responsibility for observing and reflecting on the children's spontaneous play, as well as on the adult-led activities they carry out. These observations are placed within the children's Learning Journeys as well as being used to inform our planning to ensure that all children's development needs are being met and that the activities are appropriate for the individual needs of each child.

The Classroom teacher and the teaching assistant are also responsible for the displays in the classroom as this is an important part of the children's learning environment. A large percentage of the children's work is displayed within the classroom or within the academy promoting a sense of pride and achievement.

Both the Classroom teacher and the teaching assistant attend courses regularly to keep up to date with any new developments.

Key workers -

Each child is assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that a child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents.

Parents as partners.

"Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood"

(The impact of parental involvement in early education - DCSF)

We recognise that parents' influence is important throughout childhood. Parents guide, encourage and teach their children. Research has shown that parental involvement in a child's learning is the most important factor in the success of the child's educational achievements in adolescence.

We encourage parents to play an active role in their child's learning. To this end we work hard to forge strong home-academy links. The settling in process plays a key role in this process but it does not end there.

To enable parents to work in partnership with the academy we:

- Have an open door policy ensuring that the Early Years staff are accessible both at the beginning and end of the day. Parents are encouraged to participate at the beginning of the academy year in the early morning activities with their children. More formal appointments can be made through the academy office.
- Encourage parents to take an active role in the development of their child by providing evidence for individual learning journeys through sharing children's achievements, becoming involved in theme days held at academy, helping in the classroom and on trips, attending class assemblies and weekly achievement assemblies.
- Provide a newsletter at the beginning of each term with information on the topic and how they can become involved at home. Weekly overviews of the activities are always posted onto the information board at the beginning of a new week.
- Informal meetings held regularly for parents focussing on different areas of development for example reading, phonics programme, numeracy etc.
- Provide feedback on the children's progress through two parent consultation meetings and an end of year report.

Settling in process and transition.

In the Summer term a meeting is held for the parents of those pre-academy children joining us in September. This meeting enables the parents to meet their child's new teacher and the other members of staff, ask any questions, look around the classroom and the academy and find out a little more about the Early Years curriculum. This meeting takes place before the children are invited in for their induction visits.

The children are invited to attend induction sessions towards the end of the summer term in preparation for them joining in September. These induction visits give the children the opportunity to explore their new classroom, their new academy and it gives both the children and us a chance to get to know each other a little better.

At English Martyrs, due to the small numbers, we offer each child the opportunity of either a home visit or visit to the child's current setting during the Summer term. The children meet us again in a safe environment, the parents have an opportunity to ask us any questions they may have and we get a chance to see the children in their home or nursery which gives us a better understanding of them as an individual.

Early years to Year 1

To make this transition as smooth as possible, Year 1 teachers spend some time in Early years during the summer term to meet the children. The children also get the opportunity to visit their new classroom and teacher as a class for an introductory session towards the end of the summer term. We ensure that initially Year 1 staff adopt similar routines, expectations and activities found in Early years.

Early years staff and Year 1 staff meet to discuss each child's Foundation Stage Profile, end of year report and any transitional issues which may arise. The Year 1 Curriculum includes a balance of child initiated learning and teacher led practical activities.