

# Early Years Foundation Stage

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**'We promise to shine together'**  
**Let the light of your face shine upon us - Psalm 4:6**



Our ambition is to serve our community by providing an excellent education, which is inclusive and distinctive within the context of Christian belief and practice, upholding our values in the daily life of the Academy and in our relationships with others.

At St. Mary's C of E Academy, all teaching staff deliver an EYFS curriculum through immersion in high quality teaching alongside an enriching indoor and outdoor environment. Our philosophy is to nurture every child's enthusiasm and curiosity for learning, developing both skills, knowledge and confidence as they take their first steps on their own unique journey of lifelong learning.

At St. Mary's, our intent is for children to enter the next stage of their education ready to tackle new challenges with confidence and a 'can do' mindset. We build the characteristics that enable children to manage a range of problems.

Our approach is influenced by the work of educationalists, researchers, psychologists and practitioners who have guided our knowledge of how young learn and how adults can support their learning. Our provision is underpinned by a complementary relationship between adult led, adult-initiated and child led learning. We are ambitious in our approach using a continuous cycle of observation and assessment, planning/teaching, alongside structured and systematic lessons and guided group work.



## 1. Understanding Child Development

The crucial role we play in supporting children's development and learning and in recognising the impact our practice can have cannot be underestimated. In order to do this effectively we need to have some understanding of the pattern of development of young children from pre-birth to growing into a young child. It is important to know how children develop and learn from the beginning, how they are developing at any point in time, and how they might develop and learn in the future. There are certain characteristics that are likely to be shared by children of similar ages. Understanding this can help in providing experiences, opportunities and interactions which are broadly appropriate. However, age alone is not the predetermining factor in children's development. Each child will progress in their own way and at their own rate as there are no set rules for when a child stops being a baby and starts being a toddler or a slightly older child. For example, you can usually see this overlapping nature of development



more obviously in areas like walking and talking but it is equally valid for all areas of development. Sometimes this can be puzzling for the practitioner working with very young children. Progression is often uneven across different aspects of development. This is to be expected and is quite natural. Understanding this helps to provide experiences, opportunities and interactions which are more developmentally appropriate. Accepting and appreciating that this uneven pattern of development is how children develop and learn gives practitioners the confidence to make changes to their environments and practice that will provide the best experiences and meet children's learning needs more effectively. Responding to the child's actual development in order to adapt and provide what is best at that time for the child is key, rather than expecting a child to fit into a fixed and pre-determined group programme or plan.

As children get older they become more independent and sociable. They need to be active both physically and mentally as they have a growing capacity to think, inquire and communicate. They enjoy conversations and have a rapidly growing vocabulary. They often show more perseverance in their play and concentrate on experiences which are interesting and personally meaningful. As the young child develops and learns they may continue to engage in schematic play often integrating and coordinating schemas by exploring more than one at a time. Cathy Nutbrown suggests that the coordination and connection of schemas lead to higher-order concepts, refining the child's skills leading to consolidation of their learning through opportunities to develop and apply them in familiar and new situations. Their schematic play may become more sophisticated and you will observe a wider range of skills being developed that link crucially to early literacy and numeracy. For example, moving on from filling and emptying to using materials to, match and sort, order by size, count one for one and recognise the number of objects in a group without counting them (subitise). Exploration of volume and capacity and concepts such as full/empty and heavy/light. A developed interest in rotation and trajectory can lead to mark making as the young child makes circular patterns using their fingers with paint and begins to make horizontal and vertical marks representing their drawings and 'writing'. The defining feature of being a young active learner is the need to widen experiences and learning in all areas of development. The important role for the practitioner is to determine what the young child could learn through their own interests, balanced with learning across the areas of the curriculum. Supporting this in a quality learning environment with high quality interactions will enable the young child to support and extend their learning, deepen thinking and make progress.



The “Realising the Ambition” report helps us understand the importance of early child development, there are so many things that children need to learn and develop to be able to thrive in the modern world. A young child’s development often involves repetition and cycles of actions and interactions. As a starting point, research with young children supports the view that the following dimensions are among the most important aspects of child development, underpinning not just learning but also essential for survival and flourishing: **executive function and self-regulation, communication and language, confidence, creativity and curiosity, movement and coordination, and self and social development.** Each of these five dimensions links to the others, but every child develops them differently and in different patterns. Some children will develop movement and coordination more readily than communication and language, while for others, the opposite will be true (van Dijk and van Geert, 2014).





Let's look at the definitions of each dimension:

**Executive function and self-regulation** - Executive function is sometimes referred to as the brain's "air traffic control system". It includes working memory, which is a set of stores for information we are using right now – for example when we hold directions to a new place in our mind until we get there. When we pay attention to something for a while, or switch focus to a new thing, or when we persist with an activity despite distractions all of these draw on executive function.

**Self-regulation** covers all the skills and processes that help us to stay safe and to get through the day. For babies and young children, the necessary abilities, and the brain systems that underlie them, are still developing. They don't know whether one situation is more serious than another, and their brains may well take the "safety first" approach of assuming it is worse than it is. They do not have the skills or experience to manage strong feelings, whether of fear, hunger or happiness. Babies and young children often need to "borrow" our ability to manage stress, whether it is the adult's understanding that all is well, or help to manage the strong feelings, or to work out what to do about it. There is a connection here, too, with executive function. Babies and young children cannot attend to much more than one thing at a time. They can switch their attention from a strong feeling of fear or sadness to feeling reassured with our support.

**Communication and language** - The importance of communication and language development for all aspects of children's lives cannot be overstated. Communication underlies our ability to manage behaviour and emotions, by expressing what we need or using language to regulate how we feel. Language is also much more than words. It is understanding and using patterns and cues for interaction, sequencing thoughts and ideas, and making stories that help us understand what is happening, and what is next.

**Confidence, creativity and curiosity** - Confidence can be described as a set of beliefs that we can do for ourselves, or as part of a group, that are worth doing. It includes being able to keep going even if things are difficult at first, as well as having a realistic sense of when help is needed. Creativity is about much more than expressive arts, it is the ability to wonder about things, to see them or use them differently. Creativity is vital for all learning. Think about the creativity involved in the everyday problems we face. Consider the pace of change in our world and how we need to ensure our children are equipped with the right skills for their future. The foundations are built from the child's earliest years. Creativity is crucial within science, technology, engineering and mathematical learning (STEM). It is also essential to language and literacy development. Curiosity, as well as creativity, is an innate part of being human. It is the urge to learn and develop, to see what is around the corner, in the box or what happens next.



**Movement and coordination** - As adults, if we are able, we often take for granted the ability to get to where we want, pick up what we need, avoid hazards and move cooperatively with others in games or traffic. But these skills take a long time, and a lot of practice, to develop. We all have a sensory system called the vestibular system which gives us our sense of balance and spatial awareness. It helps us coordinate our large and fine motor movements and maintain our posture. The development of movement and coordination for a child is linked to communication and cognitive development. For instance, a young child with an developing vestibular system will find it almost impossible to sit still for any length of time or possess the fine motor skills and coordination required for writing before they are ready. This is why observations of a children's actions are crucial to inform our practice and ensure it is developmentally appropriate. The best way to help babies and young children develop this system is through providing daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors.

**Self and social development** Humans are a social species, which means that day to day we have to keep getting the right balance between what we want to do and what we need to do with others. As children develop, they have the dual task of building a secure sense of self, and of discovering how to be with others and do things collectively. This is not easy, and it does not happen quickly. We can see development happening most clearly in children's play. Very young babies might seem mostly to be in their own world, but gradually through the first few weeks and months they begin to interact more obviously with their caregivers, exchanging smiles and expressions. Toddlers will play with us, and often they will play "alongside" each other in what is sometimes called parallel play. As children develop, they become more and more social, eventually taking part in long play sequences with different roles and shared understandings of rules. Once again, different aspects of development are interlinked.

## 2. Our Unique Curriculum

We follow the EYFS Framework (2020). Within this framework there are four guiding principles which shape our practice. These are:

1. Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self assured
2. Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
3. Children learn and develop in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents / carers
4. Children develop and learn at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in the Early Years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities





## EYFS Learning and Development Requirements

Our curriculum encompasses seven areas of learning and development. All areas of learning and development are important and interconnected.

Three areas are particularly important for building a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships and thriving. These are called the PRIME AREAS:

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

The next four areas help children strengthen and apply the prime areas. These are called SPECIFIC AREAS:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

Throughout their time in the Reception Year our children partake in an ambitious curriculum which is designed in a sequential way to ensure progress towards the end of Reception goals. These goals are defined as Early Learning Goals (ELGs)

Our curriculum incorporates learning through play, learning by adults modelling, by observing each other and through guided learning and direct teaching. It is also important to highlight that plans are flexible to allow us to respond quickly to children's interests and needs. Our curriculum places an emphasis on appreciating nature and the outdoors. Developing children's passion for the environment and an underpinning knowledge of the seasonal change and its impact.

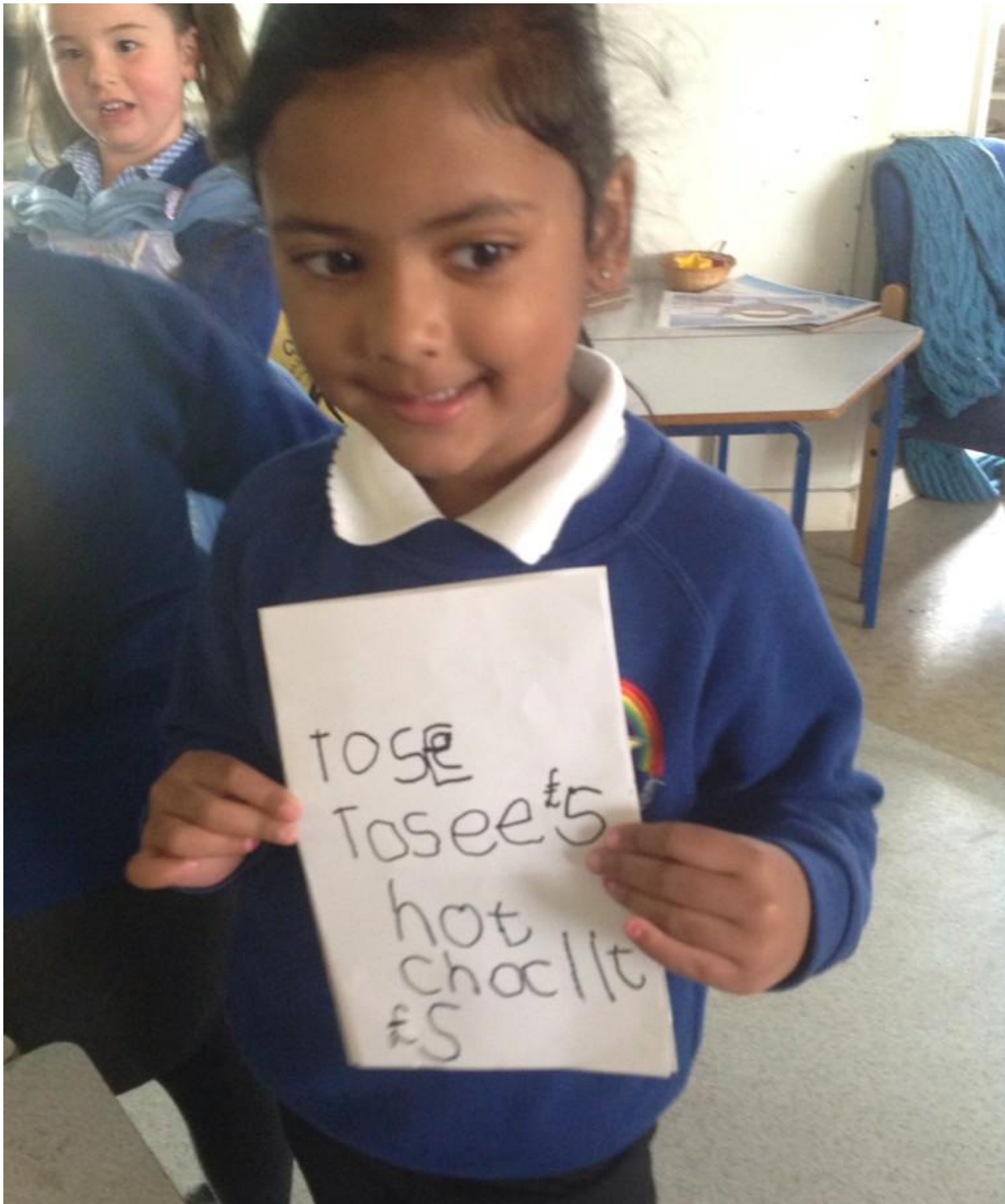
Weaving throughout our EYFS curriculum at St. Marys are three Characteristics of Effective Learning :

- Playing and exploring - the 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

These elements underpin how we reflect on each child's development and adjust our practice accordingly. Supporting children in their individual learning behaviour and observing the context of children's play is essential.

*"What children learn is important, but how they learn is even more important if they are to become learners in today's society"* Helen Moylett (2011)





## Play

*"...play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance" (Froebel, 1826)*

Play is an intrinsic part of human nature and development. For babies and children, the essential role of play is well documented. Through play a child develops their cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities. Froebel's quote above continues to resonate today. Froebel created the concept of the 'kindergarten' based on recognising the extent of young children's abilities and possibilities. He argued that play is the highest form of human development. He advocated that young children need adults who are flexible and responsive to their needs. Adults who both recognise the importance of play and can understand and use their knowledge of the child in which to base their practice. We know how important it is for children to be given time to play throughout the day to follow their own line of enquiry or individual interest. Play is often thought of as children's work and anyone observing children absorbed in play can see how hard they work. But play is not simple. Play can be and mean many different things to children and adults. We may describe activities we plan as 'play' whereas a child may not see these as play at all. 'Play' is therefore both a tricky word and concept to describe. It can be fun and joyful or difficult and complicated. The intrinsic value of what a child is actually doing and learning can be missed or ignored and therefore seen as less valuable. We also may consciously or unconsciously place more value on tasks we plan and lead with pre-determined outcomes.

Through play, the child can learn to answer their own questions, learn new skills and learn to work collaboratively with other children or adults. Whitebread (2012) tells us about two areas in particular where the evidence about the benefits of play is strong. Firstly, early language development through imaginative play either with another adult or with other children, and secondly, through play the child's ability to self-regulate is enhanced. Some theorists emphasise that when playing, the child tries out ideas and comes to a better understanding of thoughts and concepts; others see play as a means of the child coping with reality through using their imagination; and, others see play as a means to practise new skills. All of which are valid.

