

**St Mark's Catholic Primary School**  
**Early Years Foundation Stage Policy**

'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.'

(Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, March 2014)

At St Mark's children join our Foundation Stage from the age of 3. Nursery (Foundation 1) children attend either a morning or afternoon session. They start full time school in the Reception class (Foundation 2) in the academic cycle of their fifth year. At St Mark's we have a mixed age Foundation Unit where the children engage in a mixture of child initiated and adult directed learning experiences.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is based on four key principles:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development

**A Unique Child**

At St Mark's we recognise that each child is an individual with their own qualities, skills, aspirations and unknown potential. We acknowledge what each individual can do and tailor a curriculum that meets their needs and the next steps in their learning journey. We strive to ensure that each child is treated fairly and as an equal with personalised achievable targets involving an appropriate degree of challenge. As Early Years practitioners, we recognise our responsibilities regarding the welfare requirements of the children in our setting as set out in the EYFS document 2014. We acknowledge all children as competent learners and accept the challenge to harness children's interests into valuable, exciting

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and stimulating learning experiences. Staff and children aim to be skilful communicators, treating one another with the respect all should expect to receive. It is important to us that all children in the school are safe. We aim to educate children about boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand why they exist. We provide children with choices to help them develop this important life skill in a safe environment. Children should be allowed to take risks, but need to be taught how to recognise and avoid hazards. We aim to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of all members of our school community.

### **Positive Relationships**

At St Mark's we understand that children can only benefit from strong, secure and healthy relationships. We recognise parents and carers as their child's first and most enduring educators. We aim to involve parents/carers in all aspects of their child's journey through the Foundation Stage through home visits, open evenings, half-termly newsletters, formal reports on an annual basis, parental input into their child's learning experiences, alongside informal discussions with parents/carers at the beginning and end of each day. Currently we have two teachers deployed in our Foundation Stage, one Teaching Assistant Level 3 and additional support from another Teaching Assistant Level 2. Staff strike a balance between observing and enhancing the children's play, by introducing new resources, developing vocabulary and asking questions to stimulate the children's learning experiences.

At St Mark's we have strong links with the other agencies and professionals involved with the children in our setting. We set up and attend transition meetings between settings to ensure the highest continuity in the care provided for each and every child. In our Foundation Stage we encourage relationships between the children to support them in becoming independent learners, whilst valuing the qualities each individual brings to the various relationships.

### **Enabling Environments**

We appreciate that the environment has a vital impact on a child's learning and must be addressed with the upmost importance. Carefully considered planning takes place with input from all practitioners regarding how the children are engaging with the resources and how their learning can be extended. Our recently refurbished and purpose built outdoor and indoor classrooms are areas suited to creativity, exploration, independent thinking and learning. At St Mark's our planning and activities are responsive, always starting with the children. We observe their play

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and learning before planning activities and classroom enhancements, both indoors and outdoors, to develop each individual child as part of their learning journey.

The children in Nursery are assessed according to the month bands in the 'Development Matters' section of the EYFS Practice Guidance. The children in Reception are assessed according to the Early Learning Goals and a track record is kept of what month bands they are working within. Every child has a 'Learning Journey' which includes observations, photographs, the children's work and other evidence of their learning and development. Thorough assessment, both ongoing and more formally at the end of each half term, ensures practitioners are acutely aware of the children's needs and the next steps in their learning journey.

EXE screening is also used termly within the Foundation Stage. This measures the children's well being and involvement within our setting and identifies vulnerable children. If a child is identified as vulnerable they are placed on the SEN register for monitoring purposes and specific Possible Lines of Development (PLOD's) and planning is implemented to support their needs.

We encourage strong home/school links to support the children learning both in and outside of the classroom. The Foundation Stage classroom is organised into areas of learning and interest with carpet areas for more formal teaching activities and group gathering times. The children in the Foundation Stage also benefit from a well resourced, enclosed outdoor area. During child initiated time, the children can access resources independently and move freely between the indoor and outdoor classrooms. We encourage independence through various motivational techniques and the use of praise when the children dress themselves appropriately for outdoor play and wet weather.

St Mark's Foundation Stage run snack continuously whereby the children can independently access milk, water, fruit and a healthy snack when they choose to do so.

In a wider context, we ensure there are smooth transitions from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage One through visits from and to their Year One teacher and classroom staff, visits to their new classroom and a phased introduction to the other children during break times, zone parc and lunchtimes during the summer term. Transition meetings take place, where possible within a familiar setting. We also conduct home visits prior to the children's first visit to Nursery. This is to ensure that the children have a 'familiar face' to greet them on their first day, to show

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them photographs of the setting and get to know their interests and needs prior to their arrival at our school. We view home visits as an invaluable opportunity to build relationships with both the children and their parents in their own environments. Children who are attending Reception have slightly shorter days for the first 2 weeks of term in September to ease their transition into full time school.

To ensure a smooth transition for new reception children a meeting is held in the summer term prior to their start date. Parents are invited to meet all of the staff who will be involved in their child's education including support staff such as learning and parent mentors. The reception teacher also makes visits to children's nursery settings and the children are invited for transition visits either with their parents or their key worker from their nursery setting. A transition file is kept to document children's interests and stage of learning prior to starting reception. This allows the staff to build relationships with the children and their parents ensuring a smoother transition from one setting to another.

### *Learning and Development*

At St Mark's we aim to provide a wealth of new experiences alongside some familiar ones in order for the children to learn new skills, consolidate existing ones and respond to experiences first hand. Our Foundation Stage staff are involved in the children's play, both observing and enhancing where appropriate. Alongside planning for learning opportunities in continuous provision, both indoors and outdoors, we plan specific learning experiences, whole class inputs and group gathering times. Staff also make use of PLODs whereby a child's particular interest is used to enhance an area of learning. The staff provide a language rich environment in which we model correct speech patterns and adventurous vocabulary. Through play our children explore and develop learning experiences, which help them make sense of the world. They have the opportunity to practise skills, develop ideas and think creatively alongside other children as well as individually. The children communicate with others as they investigate and solve problems. The EYFS is currently made up of 7 areas of learning, 3 Prime area and 4 Specific areas:

#### Prime Areas

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

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## Specific Areas

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

None of these areas can be delivered in isolation from the others. They are equally important and depend on each other. All areas are delivered through a balance of adult led and child initiated activities.

### *Monitoring of the Foundation Stage*

At St Mark's our Foundation Stage is monitored by both the Foundation Stage Team and the Senior Leadership Team in a variety of ways. The Senior Leadership Team monitor and scrutinise planning and assessment materials and regular lesson observations take place alongside monitoring of the children's achievements and progress. As a Foundation Stage Team we have regular meetings to discuss children's needs and to moderate children's learning journeys to ensure sound knowledge of the assessment materials.

If children require additional support and are placed on the school's SEN register they will have a play plan to focus their learning towards specific targets. These targets are decided with the children and parents. These, alongside progress made, are monitored by the SENCO and agreed by parents, whilst being shared with the children themselves.

There is a Governor assigned to the Foundation Stage who has regular contact with both staff and children. There is also a Governor file available with examples of the children's Learning journeys, observations, assessment criteria and parental involvement.

At St Mark's we believe that strong foundations are the key to a successful school career. We build on the children's abilities to enable them to become independent and confident learners whilst living out our school's mission statement in everything we do.

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