

Mulberry Wood Wharf Primary

Early Years Policy

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3

Mulberry Wood Wharf Primary

Early Years Policy

This document should be read alongside the EYFS Assessment policy

Our vision

Mulberry Wood Wharf Primary is committed to striving for excellence in all that we do. Our vision is that pupils become creative and ambitious learners who strive to do their best at all times because they are motivated and guided by outstanding teams within the school. They will be able to contribute to their local community and understand how their actions impact upon the wider world. They will be caring citizens who know how to keep themselves safe and who realise that they have a role to play in looking after others. As we develop our teaching and our curriculum, we are aiming for outstanding in all that we do.

Outstanding Achievement For All

EYFS at Mulberry Wood Wharf Primary

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. 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.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early year's providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.

The EYFS seeks to provide:

- quality and consistency in all early year's settings, so that every child makes good progress, and no child gets left behind
- a secure foundation through planning for the learning and development of each individual child, and assessing and reviewing what they have learned 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

The EYFS specifies requirements for learning and development and for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. The learning and development requirements cover:

- the areas of learning and development which must shape activities and experiences (educational programmes) for children in all early year's settings
- the early learning goals that providers must help children work towards (the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five)
- assessment arrangements for measuring progress (and requirements for reporting to parents and/or carers)

Guiding principles

Four guiding principles should shape practice in early years settings. These are:

- 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.
- importance of learning and development. Children develop and learn at different rates.

Quality of education

High-quality early years education, with a strong focus on communication, is good for every child.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is about how children learn, as well as what they learn. Children need opportunities to develop their own play and independent exploration which should be enjoyable and motivating. They also need adults to 'scaffold' their learning by giving them just enough help to achieve something they could not do independently.

Helping children to think, discuss and plan is important, like gathering the materials they need to make a den before they start building. These are ways of helping children to develop the characteristics of effective learning. When children are at earlier stages of development than expected, it is important to notice what they enjoy doing and find out where their difficulties may lie. They need extra help so that they become secure in the earlier stages of development. It is not helpful to wait for them to become 'ready'. For example, children who are not speaking in sentences are not going to be able to write in sentences. They will need lots of stimulating experiences to help them develop their communication. That's why the time you spend listening to them and having conversations with them is so important.

Children learn and develop more from birth to five years old than at any other time in their lives. If children are at risk of falling behind the majority, the best time to help them to catch up and keep up is in the early years. Every child can make progress, if they are given the right support. When we give every child the best start in their early years, we give them what they need today. We also set them up with every chance of success tomorrow.

The areas of learning

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational programmes in early years settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected.

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

- 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

Seven key features of effective practice

1. The best for every child

- All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.
- High-quality early education is good for all children. It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- When they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months behind their peers. We need to do more to narrow that gap.
- Children who have lived through difficult experiences can begin to grow stronger when they experience high quality early education and care.
- High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.

2. High-quality care

- The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
- Young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
- High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner needs to enjoy spending time with young children.
- Effective practitioners are responsive to children.
- Practitioners know that starting school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

3. The curriculum: what we want children to learn

- The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
- Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.
- The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
- Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
- Young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.
- Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way.

4. Pedagogy: helping children to learn

- Children are powerful learners. Every child can make progress in their learning, with the right help.
- Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching.
- Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children's learning.
- Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.
- Older children need more of this guided learning.
- A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.

5. Assessment: checking what children have learnt

- Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence.
- Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.
- Accurate assessment can highlight whether a child has a special educational need and needs extra help.
- Before assessing children, it's a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.
- Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

6. Self-regulation and executive function

- Executive function includes the child's ability to: – hold information in mind – focus their attention – think flexibly – inhibit impulsive behaviour.
- These abilities contribute to the child's growing ability to self-regulate: – concentrate their thinking – plan what to do next – monitor what they are doing and adapt – regulate strong feelings – be patient for what they want – bounce back when things get difficult.
- Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and plan ahead.

7. Partnership with parents

- It is important for parents and early years settings to have a strong and respectful partnership. This sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years.
- This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress.
- The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.
- Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.
- It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children.

Early reading

We believe that fostering a strong foundation in early reading is essential for every child's development and love of learning. Our approach prioritises the development of decoding skills through systematic phonics when children are developmentally ready, alongside opportunities to explore and engage with books in meaningful ways throughout their learning environment.

Systematic Phonics

We introduce phonics using a structured and sequential approach, ensuring that children are ready to decode with confidence. We carefully assess their readiness and provide differentiated support to meet their individual needs. This ensures that children build a secure understanding of phonics, and the skills needed for early reading success.

Reading in Continuous Provision

Our learning environments are thoughtfully designed to promote early reading skills across all areas of play:

- **Construction Area:** Books related to building, engineering, or specific themes encourage children to connect their reading with hands-on exploration.
- **Role Play:** Storybooks, recipe cards, menus, and other written materials inspire imaginative play while reinforcing the connection between print and meaning.
- **Interactive Displays:** Books linked to display themes invite children to engage with stories, pictures, and text as part of their daily learning journey.

Promoting a Love of Reading

We nurture a lifelong love of reading by:

- Sharing high-quality stories daily to inspire curiosity, imagination, and a passion for books.
- Providing opportunities for children to take books home, fostering family involvement in their reading journey.
- Introducing rhyme, song, and poetry to develop phonological awareness and a sense of rhythm and language.

Developing Oracy Skills

We integrate oracy development into every aspect of early reading by encouraging children to share their thoughts, retell stories, and engage in discussions. Participating in activities such as **Helicopter Stories** allows children to create and perform their own narratives, enhancing their storytelling and comprehension abilities.

Our holistic approach to early reading ensures that children not only develop technical skills but also grow into confident, creative, and enthusiastic readers.

Language and communication

We recognise that communication and language are fundamental to children's development and underpin all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). A strong foundation in speaking, listening, and understanding enables children to engage meaningfully with their peers, environment, and learning experiences, while also building the skills necessary for reading, writing, and wider academic success.

Prioritising Communication and Language

We place communication and language at the heart of our planning, ensuring that every interaction and activity promotes the development of these essential skills. Through rich, meaningful conversations and a language-rich environment, children are given numerous opportunities to practice and extend their vocabulary and communication abilities. This includes:

- Carefully planned opportunities for small-group discussions, storytelling, and structured questioning.
- Open-ended play where children can develop their language skills through exploration and dialogue with peers and adults.
- Embedding language development across all areas of learning, such as discussing problem-solving in mathematics or describing observations in the natural world.

Linking to Other Areas of Learning

- **Personal, Social, and Emotional Development (PSED):** Communication supports the building of relationships, the expression of feelings, and the ability to resolve conflicts.
- **Physical Development:** Language is used to describe movements, understand instructions, and explore health and well-being.
- **Literacy:** Oral language provides the foundation for phonics, comprehension, and storytelling skills.
- **Mathematics:** Communication is vital for understanding mathematical concepts, reasoning, and problem-solving.
- **Understanding the World:** Children use language to make sense of their environment, ask questions, and share their discoveries.
- **Expressive Arts and Design:** Vocabulary and communication enrich creative expression through music, art, and role play.

Interventions to Support Language Development

We are committed to ensuring that every child has the support they need to thrive. For children who require additional help, we offer targeted interventions tailored to their needs, such as:

- Small-group or one-to-one sessions focusing on language skills, such as listening, vocabulary building, and sentence structure.
- Evidence-based programs designed to address specific speech and language difficulties.
- Close collaboration with families and external professionals, such as speech and language therapists, to provide consistent support and monitor progress.

Through our holistic and inclusive approach, we ensure that all children are equipped with the communication and language skills they need to access the full breadth of the EYFS curriculum and build a strong foundation for future learning.

The characteristics of effective teaching and learning

In planning and guiding what children learn, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately.

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

English as an additional language

Speaking more than one language has lots of advantages for children. It is the norm in many countries around the world. Children will learn English from a strong foundation in their home language. It is important that we encourage families to use their home language for linguistic as well as cultural reasons. Children learning English will typically go through a quiet phase when they do not say very much and may then use words in both languages in the same sentence. The setting talks to parents about what language they speak at home and will try and learn a few key words and celebrate multilingualism in the setting.

The continuous Provision

Continuous provision is a cornerstone of our Early Years practice, designed to provide children with purposeful opportunities to explore, engage, and learn independently. Through thoughtfully planned and resourced environments, continuous provision supports children’s development across all areas of the EYFS framework while promoting the **Characteristics of Effective Learning: Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, and Creating and Thinking Critically**.

Purposeful and Intentional Provision

Every aspect of our continuous provision is planned with intention to:

- Extend and embed learning introduced through direct teaching.
- Provide opportunities for children to revisit, consolidate, and deepen their understanding.
- Inspire curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving by offering open-ended resources and activities.
- Support key developmental skills, including communication, fine and gross motor skills, collaboration, and independence.

Promoting Independent Learning

Continuous provision is designed to empower children to make choices, follow their interests, and take ownership of their learning. Practitioners ensure that the environment is:

- **Accessible:** Resources are organised and labelled to encourage children to independently select and use them.
- **Engaging:** Activities are meaningful and linked to children's current interests, ensuring motivation and sustained focus.
- **Challenging:** Opportunities are provided for children to take risks, solve problems, and think critically in their play.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Our continuous provision actively supports the development of the Characteristics of Effective Learning by:

- **Playing and Exploring:** Encouraging children to investigate, take risks, and explore their ideas through hands-on activities and open-ended play.
- **Active Learning:** Providing resources and experiences that engage children's concentration and perseverance, rewarding their efforts with a sense of achievement.
- **Creating and Thinking Critically:** Inspiring children to ask questions, solve problems, and reflect on their learning by experimenting and testing their ideas.

The Role of Practitioners

Practitioners play a crucial role in making continuous provision purposeful by:

- Engaging in sustained shared thinking by asking open-ended questions such as "Why do you think that happened?" or "How could we solve this problem?"
- Extending learning through modelling, introducing new vocabulary, and scaffolding children's thinking.
- Regularly reflecting on the provision to ensure it aligns with children's needs and promotes progression.

Through carefully designed continuous provision, we create an environment where children are inspired to explore, challenge themselves, and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Assessment in the Early Years

Assessment is integral to understanding and supporting children's learning and development in the Early Years. We use a combination of **summative** and **formative** assessments to monitor progress, plan next steps, and ensure all children reach their potential. Our approach aligns with the statutory requirements outlined in the EYFS Framework, focusing on supporting each child's individual learning journey.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessments provide a snapshot of a child's development at key points in the year. These include:

- **Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA):** Completed at the start of the Reception year, the RBA provides a starting point for measuring progress during primary school.
- **Early Learning Goals (ELGs):** At the end of the Reception year, practitioners assess each child against the ELGs to provide a final picture of their development in the EYFS.

- **Internal Tracking System:** We use an internal tracking system to monitor progress through key assessment checkpoints, ensuring alignment with three **Pupil Progress Meetings** held throughout the year. These meetings allow us to review children's development, identify any areas of concern, and plan interventions as needed.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is the foundation of our approach to understanding children's development. It takes place daily and continuously throughout all activities and interactions.

- Practitioners use their deep understanding of child development and skilled observation to:
 - Identify children's strengths, interests, and areas for development.
 - Respond to children's needs in the moment, adapting provision and teaching strategies accordingly.
 - Inform the planning of purposeful next steps that align with the **Characteristics of Effective Learning**.

Tapestry is an essential tool in this process, allowing us to collect and share evidence of children's learning through photos, videos, and written observations. This not only supports assessment but also encourages parental engagement by sharing children's achievements and progress in real time.

Link to the Statutory Framework

Our assessment practices align with the EYFS statutory framework, which emphasizes:

- The importance of **formative assessment** to inform daily teaching and learning.
- The requirement for a summative assessment at the end of the EYFS to measure children's development against the Early Learning Goals.
- Avoiding excessive evidence gathering and focusing on observations that directly inform teaching and benefit the child's learning journey.
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By balancing summative and formative assessments, we ensure a comprehensive understanding of each child's progress, enabling us to celebrate their achievements and provide the support they need to thrive.