

Our Mission Statement

"At St Mary's the child is at the heart of the Catholic faith community. As a school, we aim to provide a high standard of child centred education, in a safe, supportive learning environment, where respect and Christian values are promoted."



Supporting Curriculum Recovery

in the

Foundation Stage

A relationship based approach to getting children ready for learning again.

"At Barnardo's Northern Ireland, we believe the system around children and young people is going to be more critical than ever if we are to help the next generation not just adapt to a post-lockdown reality, but to thrive."

The Covid-19 pandemic has completely transformed life as we know it. Our young children have experienced disruption to many aspects of their lives.

For everyone, there has been: a loss of freedom and choice, a loss of structure and control, and a loss of social interaction. The global fear of the virus and its consequences, has created feelings of uncertainty, worry and anxiety for many.

Children are experiencing a difficult range of emotions due to, repeated lock downs, school closures and the worry of their own and others' safety.

Research has predicted that this pandemic will have had the biggest impact upon those who were already the most vulnerable in society. For some children, existing inequalities or trauma will have been exacerbated, while others may be experiencing mental health challenges, domestic violence or poverty for the first time.

Given the impact of the lockdown, the return to school cannot focus solely on academic achievement, especially given what we know about the importance of mental health and wellbeing to children's ability to learn.

We know from existing research that without early intervention, adverse childhood experiences and trauma can have a long term impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

As early years' educators, we need to ensure that school is a place where wellbeing and pastoral care are the primary concern. Barnardo's deem that now "...is an opportunity to re-imagine the curriculum, and put wellbeing at the heart of the learning environment."

The staff in the Foundation Stage at St Mary's Primary School, realise that it is important for our school to focus on 'recovery' and 'transition.' This process should apply equally to children and families.

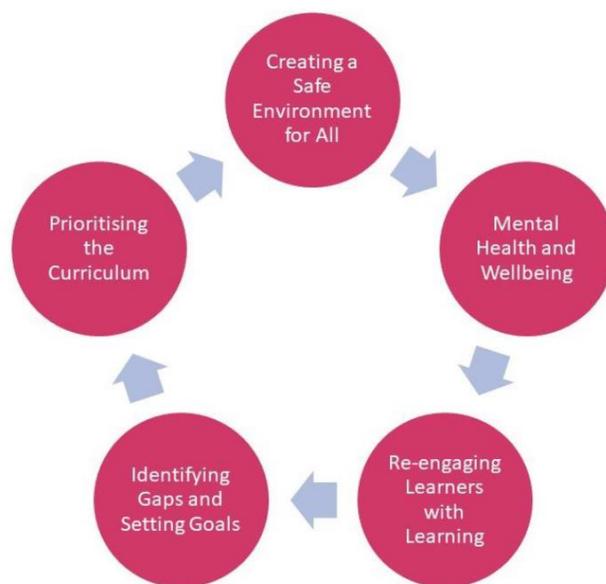
This document has been written for Foundation Stage. In it, we look at ways of supporting children in the early years setting, and their families.

This action plan complements the work of Barnardo's, The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, and The Education Restart Programme. The school's safeguarding ethos and policy remain at the core of the document.

Despite our school's best endeavours to communicate with pupils and parents, and engage pupils with remote learning via Seesaw, not all children were able to access and engage fully with remote learning. While some children had a positive remote learning experience and were able to make the most of home learning as well as additional family time, there were aspects of the curriculum which were more challenging for parents to support through online learning: for example, early language and reading skills, including the children's phonological awareness and application of phonics; the development of mathematical concepts; and, gross and fine motor skills.

Whilst we recognise that school closures have impacted upon children's academic progress, we have concerns regarding the children's development and progress in other areas. We have prioritised our concerns, and we aim to address the children's struggle with Personal, Social and Emotional Development; the acquisition and development of the children's communication and language skills; the development of the children's gross and fine motor skills; the development of early mathematical concepts and skills. We want to reconnect with parents/carers and the wider community.

Strategic Priorities focusing on outcomes for all children in the Foundation Stage



Personal, Social and Emotional Development

We will sustain a safe, secure and encouraging environment to further develop and embed children's understanding of their own emotional needs including a range of strategies to help support health and wellbeing.

1. Promote mental health and wellbeing of all pupils and staff in the Foundation Stage. All staff in the Foundation Stage (teaching and classroom assistants), will complete an online training course, www.highspeedtraining.co.uk - **COVID-19 and Child Mental Health**. This course will provide a knowledge of the effects that the pandemic is having on children's mental health, outlines the risks to children, provides strategies to help children readjust to 'normal life;' it explains how to respond and support children whom staff are concerned about. It also includes practical tips for talking about the pandemic and helping children who are going through bereavement.

Make regular purposeful reference to mental health and wellbeing in classrooms, displays, and in assemblies (when assemblies recommence).

2. Provide enhanced and/or specialist support to address the needs of children with more complex mental health and wellbeing needs (Time for Me Counselling service, Barnardo's). Staff received training from Barnardo's in March 2021.
3. Continue to build and foster an ethos in school that encourages children to talk about their worries, feelings and fears. There may be instances of anxiety around separation. This is normal and should be expected in this situation.
4. The teaching staff in Primary Two have received training in facilitating the preventative education programme, **Helping Hands**. This programme was developed by [Women's Aid Northern Ireland](http://www.womensaid.org.uk), for professionals working with children and young people. It addresses challenging issues of personal space, safety planning and awareness of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, not only in others but also in themselves.

Three themes are reinforced throughout the course:

We all have the right to feel safe all the time
There is nothing so small or so awful we can't talk about it with someone
Others have the right to feel safe with us

5. Practise **Guided Mindfulness** for five minutes daily (Youtube); this mindfulness meditation helps young children learn how to better relax, focus on their breathing, become aware of body sensations, reduce stress, and let go of worries or anxiety from their busy days <https://usborne.com/gb/quicklinks/quicklink/mindfulness-for-young-children>
6. Display information about keeping safe in school on walls, toilets, text messages, in newsletters and on our website. Ensure pupils and staff are safe and feel safe. Provide staff, pupils, parents/carers with regular updates about how you are maintaining safety measures. Encourage parents to see that children being back at school, is a positive experience.
7. Fully explain to children how you are helping to keep them safe. Reiterate this regularly and ensure all staff do the same. Model expectations clearly to our young children.

Re-engaging Learners with Learning – a Period of Reconnection

1. Establish a sense of reconnection with the school/classroom environment and the staff, through the use of photos, videos, welcome messages, virtual introductions to staff, (before children arrive in the school if possible) and before the transition from Nursery to Primary One and the transition from Primary One to Primary Two.
2. Map out the key relationships within each class. Use knowledge of friendship groups, wider peer groups, particularly adult: peer relationships to plan for opportunities within the curriculum and daily routines to re-establish, rebuild and reaffirm these relationships.

3. Visible reminders - books, displays, visual timetables - of previous successful experiences and achievements will re-connect children with prior learning and build motivation for future learning.
4. Rebuild pre-existing routines and establish new routines with clarification, consistency and allow for reinforcement.
5. Use the learning environment to promote, remind and reinforce models and images relating to successful learning processes and outcomes.
6. Promote more purposeful opportunities for talking and listening in your curriculum planning. Prioritise and quickly re-establish the systems and protocols for classroom talk, for example: Circle Time, Everyone Listening (Signal. Pause. Insist), Turn to your partner (Think. Pair. Share.). Teacher/classroom assistants will continue to share their thinking process with the children, when appropriate. Promote hope- what are we looking forward to now?
7. Work together on practical tasks to enable talk to flow; those involved are more relaxed and comfortable whilst they are playing or working together
8. Plan for all children to experience success in their learning as early as possible. Nothing builds confidence so much as "getting it right". Children will need that validation and experience of success to re-ignite their motivation.
9. Engage and motivate children to learn and re-engage with their peers through meaningful play sessions. Follow the lead of the child - if they prefer to learn outdoors or in the construction area, for example, adults should support talk, between children and between adult-child, wherever the child is most comfortable.
10. Use your assessment for learning strategies to judge when children are ready to embrace challenge, choice, and take more ownership of learning. It is better to scaffold learning and build confidence gradually through success than induce failure and lack of confidence, by providing too much challenge too soon.
11. You can use social stories to reduce anxiety over new or stressful events. Developing emotional literacy is vital in helping children to emotionally regulate. It teaches children how to understand and read the emotions in others. For

those learners who have not seen acceptable behaviour modelled at home, social stories can support learners to develop better social skills and more appropriate behaviour www.autism.org.uk

Identifying Gaps and Setting Goals

1. Identify children we feel have not engaged in home learning or those we know have significant learning loss. Make these children a priority focus group.
2. Identify significant gaps and provide learning sequences and opportunities which address them
3. Prioritise the curriculum content which is most important for pupils/students
The time available to deliver and assess the school curriculum is significantly reduced; thus, we need to prioritise content to make most effective use of the time and resources available.
4. Agree as a staff which assessment strategies (quizzes, questions and answers, discussions and group activities), will be used in the first few weeks to identify gaps and help support children.
5. The assessment process is vital. Deciding what to assess and when to assess will be critical in helping to close gaps in learning. Create an assessment pathway - Assessment for learning opportunities, your day to day assessment of children's learning, teacher and classroom observation will be crucial in informing planning.
6. Revisit PEPs for individual pupils with SEN. Are the previous support strategies/intervention programmes still purposeful? Do they need to be modified?
7. Identify any programmes or interventions that will have most impact on closing the gaps in learning for individual pupils.

Prioritising the Curriculum

1. Consider a short transition topic for the first 2 to 3 weeks back. This could allow staff to take time to assess accurately the children before ploughing into a 'normal' curriculum which may not be suitable.
2. We will not presume all children have 'gone backwards'. This may not be the case and over time, this attitude could lead to slower progress. Cognitively able children should have the capacity to keep learning at a steady pace upon their return to school.
3. Have a clear plan for prioritising early reading. Maximise opportunities throughout the day for recapping sounds. Review the pace of the Linguistic Phonics Programme. Do we need to make any adjustments to the pace and rate for teaching sounds?
4. Consider how the key skills of numeracy and literacy can be promoted across other areas of learning. Ensure the chosen topics are suited to learning, developing or revisiting basic skills.
5. Decide what assessment information is crucial. What do we need to know in order to successfully plan and pitch a curriculum for our classes?
6. Can some content/knowledge be taught more effectively in less time or covered in less depth, thereby creating more room for content which can close the gap?
7. Reconnect with outside agencies and seek advice on ways to address speech and language difficulties, that have been exacerbated due to the lack of social interaction among children, for example, Speech and Language Therapist
8. Integrate and plan for opportunities to improve gross and fine motor skills outdoors and indoors, during play based sessions, break and lunch time playground experiences.
9. Access www.mrsmactivity.co.uk for free recovery resources for early years to uplift and encourage positive thinking.

