

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."

Learning through Play Policy

Foundation Stage

June 2021



"Children are generally active learners, operating most effectively through first-hand experience. They make sense of the world by exploring objects, materials and emotions in situations which have meaning for them."

Starting with Quality, The Rumbold Report, 1990, para 56

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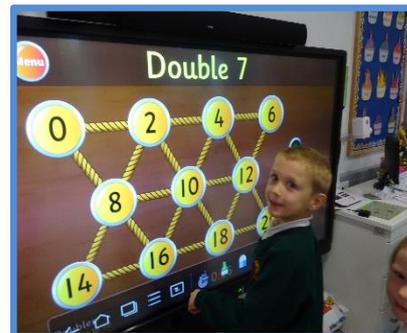
The children in the Foundation Stage follow the same routine for play each morning:

- Whole class introduction: after registration the children gather on the mat. Each learning station has been photographed and visually displayed on the IWB, to brief the children on what is available in each area for that day.
- The teacher discusses the possibilities of play in each area and encourages the children to avail of all stations throughout the week.
- Six children have the opportunity to have first choice of an area that day. Names have been randomly withdrawn from a 'play bag.' By the end of each week all the children will have had an opportunity to have a first choice of an area.
- The area the child chooses is recorded by the teacher on a record sheet.
- Children may change places during the play session, providing space is available at the particular area.
- Some areas will have an adult led focus, which is planned for by the class teacher.
- The children in Foundation Stage are engaged in a sustained period of play each morning, which includes snack time.
- When tidying up after the play session has ended, all children are expected to participate. Resources should be returned to their original places quickly.
- The children are allowed, when possible, to keep unfinished pieces of work for the following day's session. Children may display their work and place their name beside it.
- The children return to the mat for the plenary session. The children who had first choice of play that day will report about their play experiences to the rest of the class. These children can show the others what they have written or made; they are encouraged to share what they enjoyed about their activity. Peers are encouraged to ask questions.
- Photographic evidence of play experiences will be widely used and readily available.



The Role of the Adult

- Plan for and provide a range of appropriate activities from the resources and materials available.
- Ensure provision is good quality and kept clean and tidy throughout the day and on an on-going basis.
- Model use of equipment/materials in the play area to encourage pupil interest and develop children's confidence in handling.
- Encourage children to help each other put on aprons and roll up sleeves etc.
- Encourage appropriate behaviour and use of area.
- Support and extend learning through participation, offering suggestions for improvement and providing for the needs/interests of individual children.
- Use appropriate language and questioning.
- Use open-ended questions to promote sustained shared thinking.
- Be flexible to allow for spontaneous responses and activities from the children.
- Provide the children with positive feedback and encouragement.
- Use the plenary session to encourage children to talk about their play, the process they were involved in, and evaluate what they have made or participated in.
- Observe children's learning to identify achievement and to inform planning for extending learning.
- Observe use of provision to ensure the area is meeting the needs of the children and the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- Be reflective and develop provision on an on-going basis.



Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring - engagement

- Showing curiosity about objects
- Using senses to explore the world around them
- Engaging in open-ended activity
- Initiating activities
- Taking a risk, engaging in new experiences



Active Learning - motivation

- Maintaining focus on their activities for a period of time
- Not easily distracted
- Paying attention to details
- Persisting with activity when challenges occur
- Showing a belief that more effort or a different approach will pay off
- Bouncing back after difficulties

Creating and Thinking Critically - thinking

- Thinking of ideas
- Finding new ways to do things
- Making predictions
- Testing their ideas
- Developing ideas of grouping, sequences, cause and effect
- Checking how well their activities are going
- Changing strategy as needed
- Reviewing how well the approach worked



Intended Learning Outcomes: Water Area

- Fill and empty various containers using different materials.
- Explore texture and form.
- Make simple predictions from their experiences and test out ideas.
- Colour mix and experience changes in temperature, size, form, rigidity and texture.
- Practice following instructions and routine (putting on an apron, washing hands after play, putting things away on the shelf/in boxes).
- Wallow in a particular experience without interruption.
- Make links to their surroundings in relation to media and experiences.

Intended Learning Outcomes: Sand Area

- Fill and empty various containers using different materials.
- Make simple predictions from their experiences and test out ideas.
- Make marks and imprint in media.
- Colour mix and experience changes in temperature, size, form, rigidity and texture.
- Practice following instructions and routine (putting on an apron, putting things away on the shelf/in boxes).
- Wallow in a particular experience without interruption.
- Make links to their surroundings in relation to media and experiences.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Construction Area

- Play collaboratively with peers and adults.
- Use the construction area appropriately.
- Make choices.
- Talk through shared activities.
- Follow instructions.
- Make plans.
- Present ideas to others.
- Develop mathematical language: position, size, shape, comparisons.
- Solve problems with their own designs or situations presented to them.
- Create and recreate patterns and models.
- Match and sort shapes.
- Explore a range of construction materials that fix together in a variety of ways; twisting, slotting, pushing, clipping.
- Balance construction pieces.



- Design and make own models.
- Manipulate a range of equipment and tools.
- Develop own ideas over a period of time.
- Represent own experiences through imaginative play.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Writing Area

- Experience and explore a print-rich environment inside and out.
- Make marks with a range of tools.
- Use mark making to convey meaning.
- Develop own writing in play situations.
- Write labels, lists, stories with marks, letters and words.
- Experiment with punctuation.
- Use their phonic knowledge in writing.
- Manipulate writing instruments.
- Learn about structure in different writing formats.
- Know letters, line, full stop, capital letter, finger space, sentence, number, write, word, read, alphabet, sound, phoneme, blend, segment, pictures, name, caption, speech bubble, etc.
- Write in different genres: story, letter, instructions, recipe, fiction, non-fiction.
- Understand the vocabulary related to equipment: materials/bookmaking, for example, pens, pencils, crayons, envelope, sticky tape, stapler etc.



The adult will ask questions to support writing:

- Can you tell me about...?
- What are you going to write?
- Can you write...?
- Which resources will you need?
- Can you write a list/letter/card/note/ story?
- Who are you writing to?
- Which sounds can you hear?
- Can you see the letter you need?
- Can you read to me what you have written?
- Can you help me read those words?
- What could happen next?



Intended Learning Outcomes: Reading Area

- Discover how to handle books carefully.
- Hold books the correct way up and turn pages one at a time.
- Shows interest in illustrations and print in book and their environment.
- Understand that print carries meaning and is a means of communication.
- Enjoy looking at images and pictures.
- Use different voices to tell stories.
- Talk about how characters from stories feel.
- Have some favourite stories, rhymes and poems.
- Use stories that they hear in their play.
- Begin to be aware of the way stories are structured.
- Suggest how a story might begin/end.
- Enjoy an increasing range of books.
- Segment the sounds in simple words and blend them together and knows which letters represent some of them.
- Link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet.
- Read words and simple sentences.
- Use vocabulary and forms of speech that are increasingly influenced by their experiences of books.
- Understand that information can be retrieved from books.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Creative Area

- Use and explore a variety of resources, techniques and equipment in 2D and 3D, making choices and decisions along the way.
- Explore colour, texture, shape and patterns.
- Develop hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills.
- Manipulate a range of equipment and tools.
- Develop own ideas over a period of time.
- Use resources purposefully, expressing real life experiences.
- Talk through their ideas.
- Develop mathematical language, for example, position, size, shape, comparisons.
- Talk through their ideas.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Malleable Area



- Develop the capacity to use their imagination to feed their play.
- Develop and use receptive and expressive language.
- Transform objects; using their imagination to turn one object into another.
- Explore texture and form.
- Explore weight and capacity.
- Talk about what they have observed.
- Explore using tools safely and with control.
- Name malleable & tactile materials.
- Manipulate materials and explore what happens when they add new materials.
- Name additional tools and equipment.
- Develop language related to touch - cold, warm, hard, soft, squashy etc.
- Develop language related to actions - pinch, twist, stretch, roll, squeeze, pat etc.
- Develop language related to size - big/bigger, small/smaller, long/longer/ tall/taller, short/shorter, heavy/heavier, wide/wider, fatter/thinner.
- Answer questions: What materials are you using?
How did you ...? What does it feel like? What are you going to make? What will you need for ...? What do you think about your ...?



Intended Learning Outcomes: Music Area



- Explore the different sounds of instruments.
- Create sounds and develop awareness of the sounds of different musical instruments.
- Join in with known/favourite songs and rhymes.
- Sing simple and familiar songs and rhymes.
- Make up songs and rhymes. Make choices of songs to sing.
- Tap out simple repeated rhythms and create some of their own.
- Respond to sound with body movement.
- Imitate what is observed.
- Select and use equipment and instruments.
- Listen and tune in to sounds.
- Experiment with fast and slow, loud and soft etc.
- Experiment with beat and rhythm.
- Take turns and share musical instruments
- Record and listen to the music they make or music from other sources, for example, CD player/ipad.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Role Play Area

- Play collaboratively and follow instructions.
- Imaginative play with resources.
- Develop vocabulary, naming fruit and vegetables etc.
- Begin to develop ideas about healthy eating and personal hygiene.
- Develop ideas about using equipment safely.
- Develop narratives in their play, extending ideas and playing cooperatively.
- Make connections between different experiences at home and with family.
- Be involved in pretend play based around the home; cooking meals, feeding people, for example, family, visitors, and babies, cleaning and washing, preparing for parties, picnics, festivals, going shopping, going to visit family, and going on holiday.
- Make decisions about roles, for example, who is going to be mum, dad or baby, doctor, shop keeper, vet, nurse, king, queen, teacher.
- Talk about activities and use available props for role play.
- Begin to develop an awareness of the similarities and differences among families and communities.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Small World Area

- Take on roles in their play.
- Make voices and gestures in the play.
- Have conversations with imaginary people.
- Organise peers and toys in different ways.
- Look for resources within provision.
- Improvise with objects to create their play environment.
- Sing songs in play.
- Use vocabulary that is both familiar to them and adult introduced.
- Act out a story from memory or using books.
- Develop their own ideas over a period of time.
- Represent their own experiences through imaginative play.
- Play collaboratively with peers and adults.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Table Top Area Numeracy

- Rote count and count a variety of different objects.
- Make collections of things which are of interest to them.
- Sort, match and classify.
- See and make use of written numerals.
- Compare, estimate and measure.
- Make marks in play situations which communicate mathematical meaning.
- Investigate and solve practical problems.
- Test theories and ideas.



Intended Learning Outcomes: Investigation Area

- Look out for similarities, differences, patterns and change. Explore new things and new experiences.
- Use all their senses to explore and enjoy tangible, hands-on activities.
- Use the information gathered through these experiences to form ideas and concepts to help them make sense of the world.
- Talk about what they are doing and express their own ideas.
- Practise, repeat, apply or rehearse skills.
- Watch or show others how to do things/how things work.



Intended Learning Outcomes: ICT

- Respond to being given responsibility and independence with equipment.
- Show initiative in using equipment.
- Apply things they know into a different context.
- Begin to understand the processes involved in finding information from a computer, or how a piece of technology can help to complete a task.
- Role play things that they have seen adults do.
- Test out their experiences of using equipment at home or in other settings
- Evidence of using prior knowledge of different devices, gaining confidence and ability as they gain exposure to equipment.

Enabling ICT in the classroom

- Computer located in the classroom away from sand & water, with wires etc. safely out of the way.
- Mouse / interactive whiteboard pen.
- Range of computer programmes.
- Make ICT equipment e.g. Bee-Bots, digital camera, video camera, listening centres, freely accessible to children.
- Imitation ICT equipment for role play area - mobile phone without battery, till, computer.
- Wind-up toys.
- Recording sounds and voices using a range of non-computer resources microphones, recordable postcards
- Use of other access devices, available in the school setting.
- Programs to reinforce / teach a range of others skills through computer programs, for example, phonics / numeracy / literacy
- Provide challenge cards to extend the children's thinking when an adult is not in the area.



Enabling the Learning Environment

- Provide the children with the information, skills, concepts and strategies needed for success when learning independently and in small groups.
- Ensure that the area is an adequate size for the number of children and clear of any obstructions.
- Ensure the area is kept clean and tidy throughout the play session and on an ongoing basis.
- Provide a role play area resourced with materials reflecting children's family lives and communities.
- Provide materials for a variety of role play themes.
- Set up shared experiences that children can reflect upon.
- Encourage and assist children to predict and order events coherently by providing props and materials that encourage children to re-enact, using talk and actions.
- Introduce, alongside books, story props, such as pictures, puppets and objects to encourage children to retell stories and to think about how the characters feel.
- Provide for, imitate and join in imaginative play and role play, encouraging children to talk about what is happening and to model and act out the scenarios in character.
- Set up collaborative tasks, for example, construction, food activities or story making through role play.
- Help children to identify the main events in a story and to enact stories as the basis for further imaginative play.
- Resource the area with listening and writing equipment to ensure that it encourages writing of signs with real purpose.
- Include counting money and change in role play games.
- Provide story props children can use during their play.
- Provide role play areas with a variety of resources reflecting diversity.
- Provide challenge cards to extend the children's thinking when an adult is not in the area.
- Provide time, space and materials for children to collaborate with each other in different ways.
- Provide activities that involve turn taking and sharing in small groups.
- Vary activities so that children are introduced to different materials.
- Make materials easily accessible at children's height to ensure everybody can make choices.
- Provide a range of construction toys of different sizes made of wood, rubber or plastic that fix together in a variety of ways.
- Have large and small blocks available for construction both indoors and out.

- Provide a range of materials and objects to play with that work in different ways for different purposes.
- Vary activities so that children are introduced to different materials.
- Make materials easily accessible at child height to ensure everybody can make choices.
- Give time for children to pursue their learning without interruption to complete activities to their satisfaction and to return to activities.
- Provide activities that are challenging but achievable.
- Provide activities that give children the opportunity and motivation to practise and manipulate skills.
- Teach children skills to use tools and materials effectively and safely and give them opportunities to practice these skills.
- Provide a place where work in progress can be kept safely.
- Provide a range of equipment covering 'number' and 'shape, space and measure' objectives. For example, numbers, number lines, objects for counting and sorting, tape measures, rulers, 2D and 3D shapes, dice, spinners, dominoes, sand timers, clocks, calculators, books, whiteboards, clipboards, jigsaws, different shaped and sized boxes.
- A variety of homemade, shop bought and natural material based musical instruments and sound makers.
- Provide word and action cards depicting different actions for each instrument.
- Provide a CD player, suitable for children, along with CDs, a microphone and stage for singing and performances.
- Ensure there is an uncarpeted area with wipe clean floor for a water/sand tray, aprons, shelving and labelled storage; mop and bucket for children to use to clear spills up, and a dust pan and brush for children's use.
- Vary the water-sometimes coloured, scented, with or without bubbles (use food colouring, diluted paint, bubble bath/oils...)
- Resource the water/sand areas with funnels, sieves, slotted spoons, ladles, water/sand wheel, watering cans, siphons, plastic tubes, buckets, bowls, pumps, drainpipes, guttering, droppers, colanders, straws, hose pipes of different lengths, transparent plastic bottles (different sizes/same size), with and without holes in different places to make different flow and patterns, sand and jelly moulds, graded sets of jugs, measuring cylinders, beakers, wooden spoons, metal spoons, plastic spoons, measuring spoons, serving spoons, teaspoons, table spoons, rakes, scrapers, pattern makers, paint brushes (different sizes) rollers.
- Enhance sand/water areas with natural materials - sponges, corks, pebbles, pumice stones, shells, driftwood, fir cones, bark.
- Add small world equipment to other areas of play.

- Provide resources in the writing area such as:
- Mark makers: pencils, pens, felt tips, crayons and chalk;
- Tools: scissors, rulers, hole punch, staplers, paper clips, treasury tags, glue
- Paper: in varying sizes including, plain, lined, card, postcards, envelopes, notepads, diaries, whiteboards, aqua draw mats, magnetic letters, clipboards, alphabet frieze, high frequency words and name cards;
- Books: fiction, non-fiction, picture and word dictionaries;
- Provide activities that give children the opportunity and motivation to practice manipulative skills.
- Teach children skills to use tools and materials effectively and safely and give them opportunities to practise them.
- Support children with physical difficulties.
- Adult should model writing for a purpose.
- Provide challenge cards to extend the children's thinking when an adult is not in the area.

Developing Positive Relationships during Play

- Plan for and provide a range of provision. Be reflective and develop provision on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure provision is good quality and kept clean and tidy throughout the day and on an ongoing basis.
- Model appropriate and safe use of materials, instruments and equipment in area to encourage interest.
- Encourage appropriate behaviour/use, support and extend children's learning.
- Use appropriate language and questioning.
- Notice and encourage the marks children make and the meanings that they give to them, such as when a child covers a whole piece of paper and says 'I'm writing'.
- Support children in recognising and writing their own names.
- Help children to notice and discuss patterns around them.
- Observe children as they learn to identify achievement and to inform planning for extending learning.
- Encourage children to explore and talk about what they are learning, varying their ideas and ways of doing things.
- Use number language in a variety of situations.
- Use pictures and objects to illustrate counting songs, rhymes and number stories.
- Value children and constructions.

- Encourage children to explore and talk about what they are learning, varying their ideas and ways of doing things.
- Encourage children to speculate on the reasons why things happen or how things work.
- Make suggestions and ask questions to extend children's ideas of what is possible.
- Encourage children to speculate on the reasons why things happen or how things work.
- Make suggestions and ask questions to extend children's ideas of what is possible.
- Help children to understand the feelings of others by labelling emotions such as sadness, happiness, feeling cross, lonely, scared or worried.
- Intervene when children need help with difficult situations.
- Prompt children's thinking and discussions through involvement in their play.
- Show interest in the words children use to communicate and describe their experience.
- Support children's ability to express their feelings orally and talk about their own experiences.
- Encourage conversation with others and model appropriate conversations.
- Be aware of the link between imaginative play and children's ability to handle narrative. Use imaginary words to describe things.
- Help children communicate through their bodies by encouraging expressive movement linked to imaginative ideas.
- Encourage children to choose friends from all backgrounds, so that everybody in the group experiences being included.
- Recognise that children's interest may last for short or long periods and that their interest and preferences may vary.
- Teach children to use and care for materials and then trust them to do so independently. Teach children the skills they need to use equipment safely.
- Introduce vocabulary to enable children to talk about their observations and experiences.
- Talk about what is happening, helping children to think about cause and effect.
- Support children's interests over time, reminding them of previous approaches and encouraging them to make connections between their experiences.
- Use open-ended questions to promote sustained shared thinking.
- Model maths strategies in group times and encourage children to apply them.
- Where necessary, work one-to-one with children to encourage confidence.
- Observe children's learning to identify achievement and to inform planning for extending learning.

The Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum

Purpose of Play in the Foundation Stage

Play based learning in The Foundation Stage aims to provide a learning programme which will foster the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual development of pupils. Opportunities provided by play will:

- promote children's personal development;
- promote positive attitudes and dispositions to learning;
- promote children's Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities;
- encourage creativity and imagination;
- enable children to develop physical confidence and competence;
- develop children's curiosity and interest in the world around them;
- enable children to communicate in a variety of ways;
- motivate children to develop literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful contexts.

(Understanding The Foundation Stage Page 3)

Active learning is central to learning and teaching in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Active learning is an umbrella term that encompasses both play and activity based learning.

In the Northern Ireland Curriculum (Primary) it states: "Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable. "

"It is important that children have opportunities to be actively involved in practical, challenging play-based learning in a stimulating environment."

(Approaches to Learning and Teaching Page 9)



Activity Based learning at Key Stage One

Play/activity based learning at Key Stage 1 builds on the active, hands on learning, that has taken place in the Foundation Stage. It is usually linked to topic/theme and allows children to engage in a variety of focused play activities and independent play based games/activities, for example, construction, role play, art/design and table top games. P4 - Focused activities only.

(Learning through Play at Key Stage 1, page 6).

Learning at Key Stage 1 should:

- Provide children with opportunities to engage in exploration, problem-solving and decision making;
- Promote positive attitudes to learning and help children make informed and responsible choices and decisions
- Develop children's creativity
- Use a range of strategies including thematic approaches, in a wide range of contexts which are worthwhile, challenging, relevant and enjoyable.

We try to ensure that the classroom environment promotes independence and that the skills fostered in the Foundation Stage continue to be developed in Key Stage 1. In order to promote independence and support active learning, the following resources are accessible to pupils:

- I.C.T - ipads and educational apps to promote Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy
- Library area
- Writing materials - paper (variety of sizes and type), pens, felt-tips, pencils, rubbers, stapler, paperclips, cello tape, scissors, hole punch
- Writing/drawing tools - pens, markers, paint, brushes, rollers, coloured paper, tissue paper, glue, card, pipe cleaners
- Recyclable materials
- Construction resources
- Table top games to support and consolidate Literacy and Numeracy
- Water/sand tray (if required)



Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils' skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. By engaging pupils in active learning contexts across all areas of the curriculum, pupils' personal and interpersonal skills and capabilities, and their ability to think both, creatively and critically are developed.

(Ref: Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stages 1 & 2 CCEA, 2007)

Connecting Learning



Children learn best when learning is connected.

our children during play/activity based learning encompass the six areas of learning - The Arts, Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, Physical Education and The World Around Us. The learning is integrated through a topic based approach and enables children to make appropriate connections. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and those skills necessary for operating effectively in society. During activity/play-based learning, children have opportunities to develop skills in Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision Making, Self-Management, Working with Others, Managing Information and Being Creative. We believe that the learning environment and learning opportunities we provide promote opportunities for our children to develop these Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities, and foster positive attitudes and dispositions to learning. It encourages children to make informed and responsible decisions and transfer learning to real-life situations.

Observing the Child during Play in the Foundation Stage

Observations are carried out by the teacher and the classroom assistant. A flexible approach will be adopted; these observations can be planned for or spontaneous. Observations should include information about the child's -

- Physical, social, emotional and cognitive development
- Thinking skills and Personal Capabilities
- Use of language in a range of situations
- Level of involvement and concentration
- Desire to plan his/her activities



Assessment is an integral part of the **learning process**. It enables teachers to:

- monitor the learning that is taking place and the progress of the child
- inform planning, build on prior experiences and set realistic goals
- set tasks to reinforce and consolidate concepts and skills
- evaluate the appropriateness of the activities/resources being used and know when extra materials are required to supplement, enhance or extend the play
- effective pupil self-assessment - will provide the teacher with valuable information on the pupil perceptions of how they are learning

Providing Equality of Opportunity and Access for All

We are aware that pupils have different experiences, interests and strengths, which will influence the way in which they learn. In planning play/activity based learning, we are aware of the requirements of the equal opportunities legislation and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order. We endeavour to have high expectations for all pupils and will aim to provide suitably challenging opportunities for them to participate in activities fully and effectively.

Policy Review This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Foundation Stage Coordinator and the staff in the teaching and classroom assistant team in the Foundation Stage.