



EARLY YEARS POLICY

Spring 2022



“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.”

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2021

Introduction

The Early Years Foundation Stage applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. This policy is based on the requirements set out in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage that applies from September 2021.

Intent and aims

Within the EYFS at the Whinless Down Academy Trust we aim to:

- provide first hand experiences which fully engage learning
- create independent and inquisitive learners and build resilience and ambition
- work collaboratively with parents and other settings and professionals to provide the best possible start to school life
- place great value on the development of children as individuals and providing them with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to become curious lifelong learners
- embed the learning habits of the Characteristics of Effective Learning, alongside the school values
- provide an enabling environment and warm, skilful adult interactions which take into consideration the children’s starting points,
- build on prior learning and maximise every learning experience
- create a sense of fascination and enjoyment in learning through high quality continuous provision, both inside and outside, offering uninterrupted play and sustained thinking

Structure of the EYFS

The Trust’s Early Years Foundation Stage accommodates children aged 2 to 5. There are 4 reception classes across the trust, with up to 30 children in each class, each with a teacher and at least one teaching assistant and a high quality outside environment. Academy working is strong, with staff working collaboratively with planning, resources, trips and CPD. The nursery (at Vale View) accommodates a maximum of 26 children per session, across varying funded and parent paid sessions. The nursery is staffed well to ensure ratios are met and all children’s needs are met.

The Curriculum

The EYFS curriculum is planned and designed in line with the requirements of the Statutory Framework 2021 and following Development Matters 2021. Clear expectations of teaching and learning are set out in the Whinless Down Academy EYFS Teaching and Learning Policy.

As part of our practice we ensure

- children learn through a carefully constructed balance of child initiated, adult directed and whole class teaching
- children are given considerable time to explore the well planned and challenging continuous and enhanced learning opportunities
- learning opportunities are scaffolded and extended by skilful adults who know the children’s next steps.
- staff systemically check the children’s knowledge, skills and understanding so that misconceptions can be identified quickly and real time verbal feedback can be given.
- the prime areas of learning are a focus first, in order to aid early development
- topics are broad and child centred, providing pupils with real life experiences which are motivating
- learning is by design, with a clear rationale, linked to the children’s next steps

The EYFS is based upon seven features of effective practice:

1. The best for every child – all children deserve an equal chance of success.
2. High quality care – children's experiences must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
3. The curriculum – a top level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
4. Pedagogy – a mix of different approaches.
5. Assessment – noticing what the children know and what they can do (not data/evidence).
6. Self-regulation and executive function – language development is central to self-regulation.
7. Partnership with parents – parents and settings to have a strong and respectful partnership in order for children to thrive.

The EYFS framework, Development Matters, includes seven areas of learning and development that are equally important and interconnected.

Prime areas

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development

Specific areas

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

We ensure that our environment and delivery of the curriculum incorporates the Characteristics of Effective Learning:

- Play and exploring – children will have opportunities to investigate, experience different things and “have a go”.
- Active learning – children will have time and space to concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties and enjoy their achievements.
- Creating and thinking critically – encourage and support children to

Planning

EYFS staff at the Whinless Down Academy look carefully at the children in their care, consider their needs, their interests and their stages of development and use all this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience across all areas of learning and development. Staff working with the youngest children, in the nursery, focus strongly on the prime areas.

Planning is based upon the Development Matters guidance (2021) both in the nursery and reception classes. Adult directed planning, in reception, is based around broad child centred topics, with discrete lessons in maths, phonics and reading. In the nursery, topics are broad and based on real life experience, but access is primarily through child initiated learning, with some key worker group work. Continuous provision is well planned and enhancements are planned daily in response to the children's next steps.

Teaching and Learning

Learning through play does underpin our approach to teaching and learning, with clear guidance set out in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. We embrace the fact that young children learn best from activities and experiences that interest and motivate them to learn.

The children learn through a carefully constructed balance between child initiated and adult directed (reception) and key worker time (nursery). In Year R, rigours whole class teaching of maths, reading and phonics also happens daily. Adult directed teaching also takes place in small groups, allowing for focussed individualised learning. Adult interactions and questioning is crucial to the children's learning, especially during continuous provision.

Our teaching of synthetic phonics across the academy is based on the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds validated scheme – see separate phonics and early reading policy. Reading is at the heart of the curriculum. Children have daily phonics, including in the nursery. Children have access to books which are fully decodable, in line with the phonics teaching they have received. Opportunities for children to read and retell stories and foster a love of reading are given at every opportunity.

Learning environment

We recognise that children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and where there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents. The Early Years environments across the Whinless Down Academy are stimulating and relevant to all the children's cultures and communities. Continuous provision starts in the nursery, where the classroom and outside environments are set up in learning areas. Each learning area has cross-curricular resources, which children can access independently throughout the day. Reception environments are set up in a similar way, offering continuous provision which builds upon and deepens experiences and learning from nursery. Continuous provision provides children with stimulating active play which encourages creative and critical thinking. Children are able to practice skills, build upon and revisit prior learning and experiences at their own level and pace. Provision in this manner gives the children the opportunity to pursue their own interests, inspire those around them and consolidate their knowledge, understanding and skills. We understand that outside play is of equal importance as inside play and that the outside classroom offers children bigger, louder and messier experiences. Therefore, free flow is offered daily.

Observations

Staff across the EYFS use observations as a basis for assessment and planning. Staff are skilled at observing children to identify their achievements, interests and next steps for learning. The observations are used to base future planning. However, these observations are not as important as the interactions between staff and children. We know how important interactions are to all the children's learning. Significant observations are recorded in the children's online Learning Journeys (Evidence Me).

Assessment

Ongoing assessment is an integral part of the learning and development processes. Observation and teacher knowledge inform the completion of termly trackers, which support gap analysis and track progress and help identify next steps.

Reception Baseline – within the first 6 weeks that a child starts in reception, staff administer the Statutory Reception Baseline, in line with DFE guidance.

Two year checks – statutory Two year checks are completed before children turn 2 and a half (unless they have recently joined). Staff complete the 2 year check in the child's red book, with permission from the parent, and accesses the Integrated Review if necessary.

EYFS profile – at the end of the EYFS staff complete the EYFS profile for each child. Teachers assess against the 17 Early Learning Goals, indicating whether they are meeting the expected level of development (Expected) or are not yet reaching the expected level (emerging).

Reports to parents

Parents receive reports three times a year in the EYFS – these may be a two year check, a unique story or an end of year report which shares the statutory EYFS profile.

Parents as partners

At the Whinless Down Academy Trust we recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and that parents and EYFS staff need to work together so there is a positive impact on the children's development and learning. We encourage parent partnership through:

- Showing respect and understanding of the role of the parent in the children's education
- Listening to any concerns they may have
- Transition activities before the children start school
- Send reading books and home learning home to help parents support learning
- Operate an open door policy for parents
- Valuing on-going contributions from parents e.g. parent voice sheet and home learning
- Offering parent and key worker consultations sessions at least twice a year.
- Inviting parents to a range of activities throughout the year e.g. stay and play sessions, craft afternoons, class assemblies, Christmas plays etc.

Each child in the nursery is assigned a key person who helps to ensure that their learning and care is tailored to meet their needs. The key person also supports parents in guiding their child's development at home. The key person might also help families to engage with more specialist support, if needed.

Safeguarding and welfare

It is important to us that all children in the school are safe. Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them. We educate children on the importance of boundaries, rules and limits and we encourage them to be responsible for their own behaviour by supporting them to make the right choices. We teach the children how to recognise and manage risks in a supervised learning environment. We aim to protect the physical and mental well-being of all children. Please see the Trust Safeguarding and Child protection policy for further guidance.

It is important to note that members of staff do not use their mobile phones or personal handset devices in the classroom/setting and are prohibited from taking photos with their personal handsets.

All accidents are taken seriously, treated by a trained paediatric first aider and recorded in the accident book. Nursery parents are required to sign the accident book and reception parents are notified via letter or a phone call home.

Nursery follow all welfare requirements, as stated in the EYFS statutory guidance 2021, including hygiene guidance and daily safety check lists/risk assessments.

Transition

Our aim is to establish a smooth and successful transition either into nursery or from nursery into school for all children. This is facilitated by:

- Rigorous induction process into nursery, with the key person, whereby stay and play sessions are offered, as well as a reduced start if necessary.
- Visit to feeder pre-school establishments by teaching staff
- Play session held throughout the summer term for children to visit their new Year R class
- Transition meetings
- Home or school visits prior to them starting school
- Part time timetables established where necessary
- SEN meetings, where necessary.

- Transition booklets/photos/videos to share with the children prior to them starting school.

Supervision

All EYFS staff have a regular supervision session which gives them a safe environment to discuss any safeguarding concerns or other issues relating to their job role. Please see separate supervision policy.

Admissions

Nursery

Children can be admitted into the nursery following their second birthday if the sessions are parent funded. Two year olds eligible for Free for Twos funding, can start either in September, January or April, following their second birthdays. 3 and 4 year olds that are eligible for Universal 15 hours funding or 30 hours funding can start in September, January or April following their third birthday. Any additional sessions are chargeable. All children require an induction prior to starting. Please see the nursery terms and conditions for further information.

Year R

All children may be admitted into Year R in the September following their fourth birthday. However, each child has individual needs and we determine an individual part time admission programme in partnership with the parents if they request it. All children require an induction prior to starting. The reception class is organised to accommodate all children who will be five in the year of admission, recognising the needs of four and five year olds in terms of maturation physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.