



THE KING'S SCHOOL
CHESTER

Early Years Policy

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1. Introduction

“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 learning together provide the foundation the children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.”

(2020 EYFS Statutory Framework)

Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. At Willow Lodge we greatly value the important role that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) plays in laying secure foundations for future learning and development. To benefit emotional and intellectual development most effectively childhood experiences should be exciting, challenging, and creative always taking place in a safe and secure environment. The EYFS is of course a part of and preparation for future life and not simply preparation for the next stage of education.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) applies to children from birth to the end of the reception year. In our school all children join us on a phased introduction at the beginning of the school year in which they are five.

2. Aims

All children begin school with a variety of experiences and learning. It is the privilege of the practitioners working in Reception to take on the task of building upon that prior learning and experience. This is done through a holistic approach to learning, ensuring that parents/guardians, support staff and the Reception teachers work effectively together to support children’s learning and development.

The EYFS is based upon four principles:

- **A Unique Child** - every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. The commitments are focused around development; inclusion; safety; and health and well-being.
- **Positive Relationships** - children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person. The commitments are focused around respect; partnership with parents; supporting learning; and the role of the key person.
- **Enabling Environments** - children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers. The commitments are focused around observation, assessment and planning; support for every child; the learning environment; and the wider context – transitions, continuity, and multi-agency working.
- **Learning and Development** - children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

At Willow Lodge we recognise that every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. We recognise that children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Children’s attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others; we use praise and encouragement, to encourage children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

At Willow Lodge we aim to:

- give each child a happy, positive and fun start to their school life in which they can establish solid foundations on which to expand and foster a deep love of learning.
- offer each child a wide range of new and exciting experiences and give them the opportunity to consolidate, explore and test them out along with their own, individual experiences.
- enable each child, through encouragement and high expectations, to develop, to the full, socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally.
- offer a structure for learning that has a range of starting points and unlimited opportunity for development.
- encourage children to develop independence within a loving, secure and friendly atmosphere.
- support children in building relationships through the development of social skills such as co-operation and sharing.
- help each child to recognise their own strengths and achievements through experiencing success and developing the confidence to work towards personal goals.

3. Learning and Development

At Willow Lodge we recognise that children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates. We value all areas of learning and development equally and understand that they are interconnected.

The EYFS is made up of three prime areas and four specific areas;

Prime Areas

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

Specific Areas

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding of the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

We believe these seven areas are equally important and depend on each other to support a rounded approach to child development. We aim to deliver all the areas through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. In each area there are Early Learning Goals (ELGs) that define the expectations for most children to reach by the end of the EYFS.

4. Planning

Good planning is the key to making children's learning effective, exciting, varied and progressive. Effective learning builds on and extends what children know and can do. Our planning shows how the principles of the EYFS will be put into practice and is always informed by observations we have made of the children, in order to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning. All practitioners who work in Reception at Willow Lodge are involved in this process.

To ensure high quality teaching, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn:

- *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; and
- *creating and thinking critically* – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

'The Foundation Stage has a highly structured approach yet it gives children the freedom to develop their own ideas'.

Planning in the Foundation Stage it is all about getting the balance right. Our planning and the organisation of our classroom environments are the main ways in which we achieve purposeful, adult-initiated activities and give opportunities for the children to plan and initiate activities themselves. Our planning enables us to meet the individual needs of children and through the process of evaluation and discussion, feeds into our observation and assessment cycle. We give children a structure in which they can explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves.

Planning within the EYFS starts with a Long-Term overview of the EYFS Curriculum, Medium-Term Plans are based on the children's interest and are child-led as much as possible. Weekly planning is discussed alongside the children and a topic web is made in collaboration with them. The teacher and classroom assistant add further ideas and extensions depending on the skills the children need to learn. The medium-term plans are adapted as the need arises. These plans are used by the EYFS teacher as a guide for weekly planning; however, the teacher may alter these plans in response to the needs (achievements and interests) of the children.

The Early Learning Goals are the established expectations for most children to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage. We view each child as an individual and know, at the end of the Foundation Stage, that some children will still be working towards these goals whilst others will have reached the expected level of development. We believe in supporting, extending and challenging each child appropriately.

We organise our classroom environment, indoors and outdoors, in ways that encourage a wide range of choices and opportunities for self-initiated activity. Children have the chance to choose resources and are able to repeat and return to activities that spark their interest. We offer well-defined areas of interest that through their layout, promote independent access to materials and equipment.

5. Observations and Assessment

We make regular assessments of children's learning and we use this information to ensure that future planning reflects identified needs. Assessment in the EYFS takes the form of observation, and this involves the teacher and other adults as appropriate. These observations are recorded in children's Learning Journeys.

At Willow Lodge, we are currently using Development Matters (2020) and Birth to 5 Matters (2021) as part of the renewed EYFS Framework. Each child's level of development is recorded as emerging or expected within the ages and stages as well as ELGs (Early Learning Goals).

6. Assessment and Recording in the EYFS

On entry into Reception, the EYFS members of staff create a baseline assessment for each child. Children's development is then continuously assessed through a range of observations, some being spontaneous and others planned. These observations take the form of pictures, post-it notes, short observations and long observation sheets, which are measured against the EYFS Development Matters statements (2020) and Birth to 5 Matters (2021). Once observations are completed they are inputted into children's individual Learning Journeys. Within the final term of the EYFS, we provide a written summary to parents (EYFSP), reporting their progress against the ELGs and assessment scales. We give a reasonable opportunity for the parents to discuss these judgments with the EYFS teacher in the Summer Term.

7. Learning Through Play

"Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals and solve problems. Children learn by leading their own play, and taking part in play which is guided by adults."

Learning through play forms the basis of our Foundation Stage. We give our children stimulating, active play experiences in which they can explore and develop their learning, to help them make sense of the world. They have opportunities through their play to think creatively alongside other children as well as on their own. They are able to practise skills, build upon and revisit prior learning and experience at their own level and pace. Play gives our children the opportunity to pursue, negotiate, communicate, discuss, investigate and solve. The children are able to express thoughts and feelings or re-live anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

- We join in their play and model play in return.
- We use the local environment in and around the school grounds, visits and visitors to bring the curriculum alive. We plan hands-on experiences that encourage children to use their senses to discover and explore. We recognise that first-hand experiences open up learning and develop scientific thinking and creative writing.
- Wherever possible, we encourage parents into the classroom to share their skills and spend time in the Foundation Stage. Through these experiences, we hope to promote the way play is viewed.

8. Outdoor Play Area

- We provide a designated, well-resourced outdoor space as an extension of the Foundation Stage classroom.
- Trained Foundation Stage practitioners will observe, interact or lead outdoor play as appropriate in line with current practice.
- The range and scope of outdoor play will be assessed through observations, interaction with the children and the collection of photographic evidence.
- All staff are involved in the monitoring of the equipment outside. Staff record any broken equipment or damage to the outside area in the record book for repair.
- All staff are involved in the upkeep of the outdoor area. We ensure the outdoor area is clean and tidy every morning before it is set up for the children.
- Bikes and Scooters: adults closely supervise the use and safety of the bikes and scooters. Children are told how to use the bikes and scooters safely. The children are aware of how and where to use them.
- Construction equipment: adults closely supervise the use and safety of any construction equipment put outside. Adults demonstrate the use of any large equipment and explain safety rules to all children before use.
- Large Easel: adults explain to the children before use how to use the easel (bull-dog clips/ pegs) and the rules involved when using writing equipment (e.g. pen lids). Adults monitor the equipment to ensure they are not damaged.
- Windows and doors: adults check daily the doors and windows to ensure they are secure and not damaged. Children are told to be careful of fingers when using doors and are told the importance of not throwing equipment etc.
- Gross motor skill equipment (e.g. hoops, bean bags, cups and cones): adults closely supervise the use and safety of any gross motor skill equipment. The equipment is demonstrated to children before use and any rules are explained.
- Emergency procedures: in the case of an incident that requires the supervising practitioner to leave the play area, that practitioner will alert another member of staff to cover the supervision of the children.

9. Developing Speech and Language

'Young children learn more effectively through talk'

- There are many reasons why we feel that the children's spoken language plays such an important role in the Foundation Stage. Children learn best when activities engage with many senses including talk. The ability to communicate, including non-verbal messages, is essential in order to be able to participate more fully in society. Talk is the main way in which children make sense of the world around them. They need to be able to ask questions, retell experiences and test out ideas and new vocabulary. Skilled open-ended questioning by adults allows children to access higher order thinking and further develop creative ideas.
- We give children the time, space and opportunity to talk, working individually, alongside their peers and in differing groups with supportive adults. Children are able to share ideas, plan, reflect and respond to adults and to each other.

- In our planning, alongside the children we consider key questions relating to a specific area of learning. Through careful questioning and modelling within appropriate activities, we are able to widen the range of vocabulary they use. Through conversation, storytelling and role play we enable the children to elaborate and have the confidence to use a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.
- Weekly activities such as 'circle time' give children the forum to share their ideas, feelings and personal experiences. These activities also help them to develop their ability to listen carefully to others and turn-take. It is important that adults are good role models and show how much talk is valued. When a child is talking, we aim to give them the attention, understanding and interest we would expect in return and that they deserve.

10. A Partnership with Parents

'Parents are children's first and most enduring educators'

We value and greatly enjoy the relationships we establish with parents of children in our care. We believe that a partnership between parents/carers and the adults involved in the child's learning are crucial. We build on what children already know and parents are often our first port of call for this crucial information. We believe in creating an atmosphere, which is welcoming to parents, which makes them feel appreciated and encourages an all-important two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise.

- All children and parents have the opportunity to spend time with the teacher, meet other children and become more familiar with the setting prior to starting the school. This results in an easier transition and a smoother settling in period (as outlined in The Willow Lodge Transition Policy).
- We offer parents regular opportunities to talk about their child's progress in formal meetings either in face-to-face meetings, or by telephone or Zoom call
- On an informal daily basis, we actively encourage parents to talk to class teachers and support staff about any concerns they may have or to simply chat about how well their child is doing and take the time to celebrate those stepping stones of success. This on-going dialogue allows us to share and to 'tap into' the unique knowledge that parents have, of aspects of their child's development.
- At the end of each week an informal letter is emailed home outlining the activities that have taken place during the week. This also contains detailed information on topics so parents feel involved and are able to contribute and enhance aspects of the curriculum.
- Class Dojo is used for parents to comment on the children work in their personal portfolio and for the teachers and parents to communicate via messenger and class story

All staff involved with the EYFS aim to develop good relationships with all children, interacting positively with them and taking time to listen to them. At our school the EYFS teacher acts a 'Key Person' to all children in EYFS, supported by the Teaching Assistant.

11. Equal Opportunities

At Willow Lodge we aim to provide all pupils, regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or ability, equal access to all aspects of school life and work, to ensure that every child is valued fully as an individual. Practitioners, as role models, are aware of the influence of adults in promoting positive attitudes and use that influence to challenge stereotypical ideas. For further information see the Equal Opportunities Policy.

12. Inclusion

We value the diversity of individuals within the school and do not discriminate against children because of 'differences'. All children at Willow Lodge are treated fairly regardless of race, religion or abilities. All children and their families are valued within our school.

Children with special education needs and disabilities will be given support as appropriate, to enable them to benefit from the curriculum. This includes children that are more able, and those with specific learning difficulties and disabilities.

In our school we believe that all our children matter. We give our children every opportunity to achieve their best. We do this by taking account of our children's range of life experiences when planning for their learning.

In the EYFS we set realistic and challenging expectations that meet the needs of our children. Reception teachers discuss targets with the child and their parents/guardians. Progress is monitored and reviewed every term.

The school's SEND co-ordinator is responsible for providing additional information and advice to practitioners and parents, and for arranging external intervention and support where necessary. For further information see Special Educational Needs Policy.

13. Monitoring and Review

It is the responsibility of the EYFS teachers to follow the principles stated in this policy.

There is a named Governor responsible for the EYFS. This governor will discuss EYFS practice with the practitioners regularly and provide feedback to the whole governing body, raising any issues that require discussion.

The Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher and subject co-ordinators will carry out monitoring on the EYFS as part of the whole school monitoring schedule.