

Early Years Policy

St Mary's Horsforth Catholic Voluntary Academy



"Happy together in God's family,
we love, grow and learn."

Approved by:	Aoibheann Kelly-Edwards	Date: September 2023
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Last reviewed on:	September 2026
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Next review due by:	September 2027
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The school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors to share this commitment.

Aims and Principles

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. At St Mary's, children join the Reception class in the academic year that they turn five.

In partnership with parents and carers we enable the children to begin the process of becoming active learners for life in a holy place of safety. We endeavour to ensure that in line with the Statutory Framework for the EYFS 2026, the children "learn and develop well and kept healthy and safe".

We aim to support children by "teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness'" and therefore, ensure that this "gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life."

The EYFS is based upon four principles:

- A unique child – developing resilient, capable, confident and self-assured individuals.
- Positive relationships – supporting the children in becoming strong and independent.
- Enabling environments – where opportunities and experiences respond to the individual
- Needs of the child by developing a strong partnership between practitioners, parents/carers and the child.
- Learning and developing – an acknowledgement that children learn in different ways and at different rates.

A Unique Child

We recognise that:

- Every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- All children develop in individual ways, at varying rates.
- Children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others therefore we use praise and encouragement, as well as celebration assemblies and rewards, to encourage children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

RE

At St Mary's, children in Reception take part in weekly RE sessions. Although we follow Source to Summit: Lighting the Path scheme, Godly play is used to enhance these sessions and support children's understanding of the bible stories. Children attend both Key Stage and whole school celebration of the word sessions and assemblies by the end of the first Autumn half term, if they are ready. Class celebration of the word are led by the EYFS teacher, to support the school's mission statement, 'Happy together in God's family, we love, grow and learn.'

Inclusion/Special Educational Needs (SEND)

All children and their families are valued at St Mary's. Children are treated as individuals and have equal access to all provisions available. All children are encouraged to achieve their personal best and planning is adapted to meet the needs of all children, including those with

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged children, and those eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP). We are committed to ensuring that EYPP funding is used effectively to provide targeted support, enrich learning opportunities and help reduce barriers to achievement. Assessment considers contributions from a range of perspectives to ensure that any child with potential special educational needs, disabilities, developmental delays, or other barriers to learning is identified at the earliest possible opportunity. Early identification of SEND is crucial in enabling staff to provide appropriate support and ensure that every child can make the best possible progress. Concerns are always discussed with parents/carers at an early stage, and we work collaboratively with families and external professionals, where appropriate, to meet children's individual needs and secure positive outcomes for all.

We meet the needs of all our children through:

- Planning opportunities that build upon and extend children's knowledge, experience and interests, and develop their self-esteem and confidence;
- Using a wide range of teaching strategies based on children's learning needs;
- Providing a wide range of opportunities to motivate and support children and to help them to learn effectively;
- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment in which the contribution of all children is valued;
- Using resources which reflect diversity and are free from discrimination and stereotyping;
- Planning challenging activities for children whose ability and understanding are in advance of their language and communication skills;
- Monitoring children's progress and taking action to provide support as necessary, with both academic and social learning.

Welfare

It is important to us that all children in our school are 'safe.' We educate children about boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand why they exist. We provide children with choices to help them develop this important life skill. Children should be allowed to take risks but need to be taught how to recognise and avoid hazards. We aim to protect the physical and psychological well-being of all our children.

"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." (Statutory Framework for the EYFS 2026).

At St Mary's, we understand that we are legally required to comply with certain welfare requirements as stated in the Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2026.

We understand that we are required to:

- Promote the welfare and safeguarding of children.
- Promote good health, preventing the spread of infection and taking appropriate action when children are ill.
- Manage behaviour effectively in a manner appropriate for the children's stage of development and individual needs.
- Ensure all adults who look after the children are suitable to do so.
- Ensure that the premises, furniture and equipment are safe and suitable for purpose

- Ensure that every child receives enjoyable and challenging learning and development experiences tailored to meet their needs.
- Maintain records, assessments, policies and procedures required for safe and efficient management of the setting and to meet the needs of the children.
- In accordance with the Statutory Framework (2026), our Early Year's teacher is a trained DSL.
- All staff working in the Early Years have regular safeguarding training.
- Early Year's attendance is monitored and checked following the school's policy (see attendance policy).
- Ensure staff in the EYs class are Paediatric First Aid trained.
- Ensure that children's privacy is considered and balanced with safeguarding and support needs when changing nappies and toileting.
- Ensure safer eating guidance is followed by obtaining information about any special dietary requirements, food allergies and intolerances and an adult with the children when food is being consumed.

Positive Relationships

At St Mary's, we recognise that children learn to be strong and independent from secure relationships. We aim to develop caring, respectful, professional relationships with the children and their families.

Parents as Partners

We recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value the contribution they make. We recognise the role that parents have played and their future role, in educating the children. We do this through:

- An information evening for parents in the summer term where they receive the Reception Information pack which highlights school start and finish times, uniform and other administrative information listed below, it also informs the parents of the school's mission and aims.
- An opportunity to talk to the Reception team and representatives from other areas of school life. E.g. PTA and Governors.
- Asking parents to complete an admissions form, a medical form and write a synopsis about their child including their likes, dislikes and any concerns they may have.
- Asking parents to sign permission slips for visits out of school, photographs of their child for assessment purposes and using the internet at school.
- Encouraging parents to talk to their child's teacher if there are concerns.
- Inviting parents to attend informal meetings providing information about other areas of the curriculum. E.g. Phonics, reading, literacy and maths.
- Talking to parents about their child before their child starts in our school.
- Ensuring children have the opportunity to spend time with their teacher before starting school during transition sessions, stay and plays and setting visits.
- There is a formal meeting for parents twice a year at which the teacher and the parent discuss the child's progress with the teachers. Parents receive a report on their child's attainment and progress at the end of each school year.
- Organising a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between child, school and parents / carers: stay and play sessions, craft sessions, class assemblies, sports day etc.
- Inviting parents/carers to make comments through Tapestry.

- Written contact through reading diaries as well as the acknowledgement that parents can ring school to contact staff or the Early Years Leader.
- Offering parents/carers regular opportunities to talk about their child's progress in our reception class and allowing free access to the children's 'Learning Journey' on Tapestry with an electronic copy made available for parents/carers at the end of the school year.
- Parents/carers are made aware of the curriculum and ongoing activities through Tapestry, parent meetings, half termly curriculum letters, handouts at parents evenings, the school newsletter and Twitter.
- 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 as 'Key Person' to all children in EYFS, supported by the other practitioners.
- Parents within the local community attend a stay and play group, Little Mary's, every Tuesday morning with children aged 0-4 years old, to meet other families, chat, play, and join in with craft activities, singing and story time. This is run by a qualified teacher and supported by the schools HLTA and art specialist.

Enabling Environments

We aim to create an enhanced and stimulating learning environment where children feel confident, secure and challenged. The children have daily access to an indoor and outdoor environment that is set up in discrete areas of learning with planned continuous provision. Effective learning builds and extends upon prior learning and following children's interests.

Effective planning is informed by observations of the children to ensure we follow their current interests and experiences. These observations are recorded in the children's individual learning folders on the iPad.

Play based learning is paramount and children direct their own learning from carefully planned opportunities provided by staff. Staff will enhance play and extend as needed to further individual learning.

Learning and Development

Teachers and Early Years Practitioners provide the curriculum in a reception class of up to a class size of 30 children.

There are seven areas of learning and development of which three are "prime areas," and four "specific areas."

The prime areas are

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

The specific areas are

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

Through careful assessments and observations, including information provided by parents and other settings, children's development levels are assessed on entry. The balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning as children grow in confidence and ability within the three prime areas. However, if a child's progress in any prime area gives cause for concern, staff will discuss this with the child's parents and/or carers and agree how to support the child.

At St Mary's, each area of learning and development is implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems and relate to others. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. There is an ongoing judgement to be made by practitioners about the balance between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults. Practitioners must respond to each child's emerging needs and interests, guiding their development through warm, positive interaction. 'As children grow older and move into the reception year, there should be a greater focus on teaching the essential skills and knowledge in the specific areas of learning. This will help children to prepare for Key Stage 1'. (Statutory Framework for EYFS 2026)

Planning and guided children's activities will reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. At St Mary's, we support children in using the three characteristics of effective teaching and learning. These 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; and
- Creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

(Taken from Statutory Framework for the EYFS 2026)

Equal Opportunities

All members of the school are treated as individuals. We aim to meet the needs of all, taking account of gender, ability, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, special educational needs, disability, and social circumstances. All staff ensure that the needs of the 'whole child' are met.

Health and Safety

At St Mary's there are clear procedures for assessing risk which includes procedures for keeping children safe during outings and for any aspects of the environment or provision that may require a further risk assessment.

In line with the EYFS statutory framework 2026, at St Mary's we undertake;

- A whole school medical policy ensuring that there are systems in place to ensure that medicines and the systems for obtaining information about a child's needs for medication are kept up to date. (See separate policy).
- Fresh drinking water is always available.
- Children's dietary needs are recorded and acted upon when required.
- Milk is free until a child's 5th birthday, then parents have the option to pay for milk.
- Children have the choice of bringing their own healthy snack or having free fruit which is available during the day.
- Staff in the Early Years are Paediatric First Aid trained, and staff record any accidents/ and records are kept.

- A fire and emergency evacuation procedure, risk assessment and policy is in place and practiced every half term, (see separate policy).
- The school has a lockdown procedure that is practiced every term.(see separate policy).
- A safeguarding policy stating how mobile phones and cameras are to be used and stored securely whilst children are in the setting. Cameras that are used in school must not be used for staff own personal use.

The Learning Environment

The EYFS classroom is organised to allow children to explore and learn securely and safely. There are areas where the children can be active or take things more quietly. The classroom covers all learning areas, where children can find and locate equipment and resources independently. The EYFS class has its own enclosed outdoor area. This has a positive effect on the children's development. Being outdoors offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors. It offers the children the ability to explore, use their senses and be physically active and exuberant. We plan activities and resources for the children to access indoors and outdoors that help the children to develop in all areas of learning.

Transition

From Pre-school settings

During the summer term prior to a child's entry into the Reception year, the following procedures have been put into place to ensure successful transition:

- Parents are invited to a meeting to ensure they know about school procedures and can voice any concerns, they may want to express.
- A comprehensive booklet is given to parents with all the information they need to support their child to be ready for September.
- In the summer term the children visit school three times, twice with parents/and once without the support of parents/carers.
- The Reception class teacher at St Mary's, make links to feeder settings. The number of meetings/visits will depend on the child's needs and how much information gathering is required to support the child's transition.
- A transition booklet containing photos of the setting, EYs staff and the learning environment is given to every child to support them over the summer holiday.

From Reception Class to Key Stage 1

During the final term in Reception, the EYFS Profile is completed for each child. The Profile provides parents and carers, staff and teachers with a well-rounded picture of a child's knowledge, understanding and abilities, their progress against expected levels, and their readiness for Year 1. The Profile includes on-going observation, all relevant records held by the setting, discussions with parents and carers, and any other adults whom the teacher, parent or carer judges can offer a useful contribution.

Each child's level of development is assessed against the Early Learning Goals (ELG). The profile indicates whether children are meeting 'expected' levels of development, or whether they have not yet reached expected levels ('emerging'). The Year 1 teacher is given a copy of the Profile report together with a short commentary on each child's skills and abilities in

relation to the three key characteristics of effective teaching and learning. This informs the dialogue between Reception and Year 1 teachers, about each child's stage of development and learning needs and assists with the planning of activities in Year 1.