



The Federation of St Elphege's and Regina Coeli Catholic Schools



Early Years Policy

Scope:		Federation
Date Adopted:		Autumn 2022
This Review:		NA
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Approved	EHT:	<i>S. Hawkes</i>
	Governor:	<i>M Dann</i>
		Every 3 years or when regulations change
		Curriculum Committee



The Federation of St Elphege's and Regina Coeli Catholic Schools



'With God all things are possible'

'Where there is love, there is God'

The Federation of St Elphege's and Regina Coeli Catholic Schools will give every child the best possible education because each individual is uniquely created and precious to God. As a Catholic community, guided by the Holy Spirit, we will follow the example of Jesus Christ in all aspects of daily life.

With the help of God's love, the Federation of St Elphege's and Regina Coeli Catholic Schools will seek to develop the whole child. Each child is uniquely created and precious to God and it is the Federation's mission, guided by the Holy Spirit, to nurture each child's spiritual, moral and academic growth.

Inspired by the teachings of Christ we will...

- Develop our children's faith, spirituality and joy in the love of God
- Educate our children to the highest standards thus realising their own potential
- Instil in our children the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed and take pride in their achievements recognising we each have special gifts and talents
- Encourage everyone to be more than they thought possible, in a secure and loving environment
- Promote a caring community where we will all behave well. We will be dignified in our actions, demonstrating good manners, tolerance, kindness and generosity to ourselves and others
- Prepare our children today to become tomorrow's responsible and independent individuals equipped to face life's challenges
- Ensure our Federation is a happy, safe and welcoming place where we all enjoy learning, work hard, support one another and do our best
- Create an active partnership of love, joy and high expectations between children, parents, carers, staff, governors, parishes and the wider community

Inclusion statement

The school community will ensure that ALL children irrespective of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender (including those who identify as transgender), sexual orientation, ability, special educational need, disability, faith or religion, age, culture, socio-economic or home background will have equal access to the breadth of this policy.

The achievements, attitudes and well-being of all our children matter and the school will endeavour to promote their individuality. Children with learning disabilities and gifted and talented children will be allowed to express themselves according to their ability. Work will be differentiated to meet their needs and achievements will be celebrated.

This Policy will be implemented through on going consultation with all members of the school community and developments in law or statutory guidance.

VALUES

Family - we seek to act fairly and responsibly in our relationships to ensure all are welcomed, nurtured and successful.

Aspiration - to provide the highest standards of teaching and learning so all in the schools' communities excel.

Inclusiveness - we believe that all are created in the image of God and therefore we will respect the unique and intrinsic value of every person, promoting equality and celebrating diversity.

Tolerance - to develop schools where there is true understanding of culture, respect for difference and special care for those most in need.

Harmony - to develop the schools as faith communities where the Gospel values of truth, honesty, forgiveness and reconciliation are lived.



“The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences”

(Loris Malaguzzi)

The Early Years and Foundation Stage

The Federation of St Elphege's and Regina Coeli Catholic Schools aim to give every child the best possible education in a Catholic environment. Our schools are welcoming communities and we value our children and families. We believe that it is through a strong partnership that the school and family work best. We recognise each child as a unique individual who brings gift and talents to enhance our school community. In return, we will provide a learning environment that is rich in experiences and opportunities so that each child can fulfil their true potential.

For many children, their journey through our schools begins in nursery or reception; this phase is also called the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Across the Federation's EYFS, teachers have high expectations, a shared sense of purpose, and above all, a collective belief in their common ability to make a difference to the education of all the children they serve.

Our schools recognise that much of children's learning is driven by their interests, particularly in early years. We understand that children's play and self-directed exploration are important ways for them to learn. However, we also realise that it is our responsibility to ensure that all children receive experiences and the teaching they need to become secure in key concepts, such as early numeracy, early writing and early reading or phonics. Through a high-quality enabling environment and curriculum, loving care and effective pedagogy, children will be well equipped, ready for the next stage in their learning.

Play and child-led learning have an important role in shaping children's understanding of the world and developing social constructs. However, as children develop, it is very important that they experience adult-guided learning and direct teaching so that they can master skills such as accuracy in spelling simple words, reading age appropriate sentences with confidence and recalling number facts. At this young age, children can make rapid progress over relatively short periods; over just a few weeks, children's ability to attend to a task or make appropriate links in their knowledge can develop quickly. It is for this reason that we believe it important provide a balance of child-led learning and adult-guided learning/direct teaching so children are encouraged to make this progress when they are ready. We understand the importance of adult-child interaction and the impact it has on a child's development. In our settings, we ensure that the adults are with the children as much as possible: listening to them, developing conversations, playing with them, and teaching them new skills and concepts. As the children grow older, and as their development allows, this balance gradually shifts towards more adult-led activities and direct teaching to help children prepare for more formal learning. It is important that we prepare children as well as possible so that they are ready to move into Year 1, when the time comes.

Aims

- To develop a relevant and carefully structured curriculum, provided by practitioners with good knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
- To plan opportunities that build upon and extend children's knowledge, experience and interests, and develop their self-esteem and confidence.
- To be aware that children develop rapidly and at different rates in all areas of the curriculum during the early years. This requires careful planning and evaluation of the provision throughout the year.
- To work in partnership with parents/carers to ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued.
- To foster a positive attitude towards learning that leads to a love of learning by building on what children already know and planning purposeful learning activities that incorporate play.
- To embrace and support the Catholic ethos by following our school's FAITH values.
- To plan opportunities for children to engage in activities that are self-initiated and adult initiated.
- To plan purposeful observation into the daily routine and ensure that this feeds into the short term planning and the children's Learning Journeys.
- To ensure the learning environment and resources are rich and stimulating in order to make the curriculum explicit and visible to the child. Equal consideration will be made in planning for provision in the indoor and outdoor areas.
- To ensure that meaningful interactions take place at all times in the learning environment so that children's communication and language skills develop.
- To set up the environment to develop independent learners and ensure that all children are challenged.
- To support children in developing a love of reading and help build their imagination and vocabulary.

The Curriculum

The Federation follows the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. All schools and Ofsted-registered Early Years Providers must follow the EYFS, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes.

"The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life."
Department for Education, 2021

The framework supports the school in improving outcomes for all children, especially disadvantaged children. It puts early language at the heart of a broad curriculum and highlights the importance of spending more time with the children - interacting, supporting and scaffolding children's thinking and learning.

There are seven areas of development that shape educational programmes in early years settings. Educational programmes must involve activities and experiences for children, which are set out under each area of learning. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. (*Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, 2021*).

These seven areas consist of:

	Areas of Learning & Development	Strands
Prime Areas	Personal, Social and Emotional	<i>Self-regulation Managing self Building relationships</i>
	Communication and Language	<i>Listening, attention and understanding Speaking</i>
	Physical Development	<i>Gross motor skills Fine motor skills</i>
Specific Areas	Literacy	<i>Comprehension Word reading Writing</i>
	Mathematics	<i>Numbers Numerical patterns</i>
	Understanding the World	<i>Past and present People, culture and communities The natural world</i>
	Expressive Arts & Design	<i>Creating with materials Being imaginative and expressive</i>

As a Catholic school, we also follow the Early Years Curriculum in the 'Come and See' Religious Education scheme. During RE sessions, the children learn to show reverence and join in daily prayers with the class. The sessions are creative and help children explore various ways of talking to God, for example through song, prayer or drawing. Children are encouraged to recognise God's gifts to us, such as family, friends and the world around us. They learn about the Catholic faith and other faiths, many of which make up our rich school community. Part of life in a Catholic school is celebrating opportunities for whole school worship, including liturgy assemblies, rosary and Mass. Children are encouraged to take part in these times of collective worship, through writing their own prayers or contributions to share.

Development Matters 2021: This non-statutory guidance material supports our practitioners in designing an effective early years curriculum, building on the strengths and meeting the needs of the all children. Children develop quickly in the early years and practitioners aim to do all they can to help children have the best possible start in life. Children have a right to provision which enables them to develop their personalities, talents and abilities irrespective of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties, disabilities or gender. This guidance helps our staff to understand how children develop and learn and how they can support each individual child's development pathway.

Characteristics of Effective Teaching & Learning

The characteristics of effective teaching and learning describe how children learn. Early Years Practitioners have a commitment to reflect on these and respond not just to *what* children learn, but also to *how* they learn.

Playing and exploring - engagement

Finding out and exploring, playing with what they know & being willing to 'have a go.'

Active learning - motivation

Being involved and concentrating, keeping on trying & enjoying achieving what they set out to do.

Creating and thinking critically - thinking

Having their own ideas, making links & choosing ways to do things.

An Enabling Learning Environment

The impact of children's surroundings on their development is well documented. Friedrich Froebel (early 1800s) compared designing an environment for children to planning an organic and ever-changing garden, which can inspire and guide children's imagination and behaviour.

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning. Enabling environments encourage young children to play because they feel relaxed, comfortable and 'at home' in them. When children feel emotionally safe and secure they are able to explore and find out about the place they are in and the things they can see, touch, manoeuvre and manipulate. The EYFS environment is described in terms of three aspects: the emotional environment, the outdoor environment, the indoor environment. These three aspects of the environment together make up the environment for play and learning in the EYFS.

The Federation aims to provide a learning environment that stimulates and extends the natural curiosity of young children, both inside and outside. The indoor and outdoor provision will give children the opportunities to explore all areas of the curriculum taking into account the children's needs, backgrounds and interests. The provision will continuously be reviewed and evaluated to ensure that optimal learning can take place at all times.

Assessment

‘Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement’

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2021 (2.2)

Formative and summative assessment are used in the EYFS to ensure children make progress. Ongoing formative assessment is given high priority and is at the centre of early years practice. In order to support every child, the provision must match the child’s needs and interests. Assessment of each child’s development is achieved through skillful observation. Ongoing formative assessment is used to inform short-term planning. Practitioners respond immediately to their observations and interactions with children, by altering and enhancing learning opportunities. In Nursery and Reception, each child’s achievements are recorded either as observations or through the child’s work or photographs that contribute towards each child’s learning journey. Learning Journeys are a record of each child’s journey through the Foundation Stage and reflect the uniqueness of each individual child. At the end of the Foundation Stage, the learning journeys are handed on to their Year 1 teacher to inform their planning and support a smooth transition from EYFS to Key Stage 1.

Summative assessment happens at three points in the Early Years Foundation Stage;

- The progress check at age two
- The Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) in the first 6 weeks of beginning Reception
- The EYFS Profile at the end of Reception.

Children are tracked and assessed termly in each of the 17 areas of learning. Practitioners use the descriptors from *Development Matters* and, later on in the year, the Early Learning Goals (ELG) to support their judgements. The children’s progress and attainment is moderated and reviewed with the Senior Leadership Team termly and adjustments in provision are made accordingly.

In the Summer Term, Reception practitioners complete the EYFS Profile for each child. Each child’s level of development is assessed against the ELG using ongoing formative assessment, contributions from parents and other professionals. By making a best-fit-judgment, practitioners must indicate whether a child is:

- Meeting expected levels of development (ELG achieved)
- Not yet reaching expected levels (Working Towards ELG)

This information is shared with the children’s parents, the Local Authority, the Department for Education and Year 1 teachers.

There is no DfE requirement for formal summative assessment in the Nursery. However, to support planning and transition, practitioners use *Development Matters* descriptors to aid them in making judgements each term.

Reading & Phonics in Early Years

The Federation recognises the importance of reading in early education therefore the development and love of reading is a priority. We do this through ensuring children are exposed to a rich variety of texts which are woven through the weekly planning. Planning is based around a core text which stimulates the learning in Early Years. The children also have the opportunity to hear many stories throughout the week; teachers share a class story three times a day.

To ensure our children develop the skills to become confident, independent readers we start teaching phonics right from the start, using the Read, Write Inc. (RWI) phonics programme. RWI is a systematic and progressive phonics programme which ensures children steadily develop their phonic knowledge and become fluent readers. In Nursery children's phonological knowledge begins with identifying environmental sounds and sound recognition, moving onto letter-sound recognition (Set 1 - RWI). In Reception, children are put into homogenous groups for their daily phonics sessions. They are taught set 1 and set 2 sounds from the RWI programme. Some children move onto set 3. Children are regularly assessed and any gaps in learning are quickly addressed. Groups change regularly, following on from assessments, to ensure each child is following the phonics programme at their correct level.

Reception children use phonics reading books (decodable texts) that are closely matched to their phonic knowledge. These are taken home every night to practise reading and the children are heard read in school. They are also assigned books electronically for extra reading practice. All children in EYFS take home a story book to share with an adult to help develop their vocabulary, imagination and love of reading.

Partnership With Parents/Carers

The Federation is committed to establishing a strong partnership with parents/carers. We recognise parents as the first educators and know that strong relationships between home and school have long-lasting, beneficial effects on children's learning and well-being as they progress through the school. These partnerships begin with the 'Stay and Play' afternoon towards the end of the academic year so children can visit their new setting and meet the teachers. Parents/carers also attend a 'New to the school' meeting which provides them with information about the EYFS settings and organisation. In September, this is followed by a home visit before the child's settling-in session.

Parents/carers know their child intimately, and are therefore encouraged to contribute to their children's learning journey. Regular 'Learning Journey Events' are held throughout the year, where parents/carers are invited to school for a workshop in an area of the curriculum and then given the opportunity to share the Learning Journey with their child.

In Nursery, parents can contribute to their child's learning journey by sharing their 'wow moments' with the teachers, via Google Classroom.

Parent/carer meetings take place twice a year; during the Autumn and Spring Terms. At the end of the Summer Term, the parents of children in the Nursery and Reception receive a full report commenting on their child's progress and development in-line with the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum. Should parents wish to, they may request a meeting with their child's class teacher during the summer term, also. Nursery also complete a 'settling in report' during the child's first term to inform parents/carers of their child's development.

Parent and carers are invited to attend curriculum meetings that are held each term. The curriculum meeting gives parents an overview of the curriculum for the coming term and useful strategies and tools to support children's learning at home. Parent workshops in reading, phonics and mathematics are also scheduled throughout the year. The aim of the workshops is to provide a hands-on information session so that parents are familiar with the strategies used in school to support their children's learning in these areas of the curriculum.

There are many open channels for sharing information between home and school. Parents can expect to be kept informed through informal discussions at collection, through Google Classroom, or by letters and emails and the school website. Regular, ongoing dialogue is encouraged with parents, especially those who would like extra information or have any concerns about their child's learning.

Reading at home

In St. Elphege's Nursery, the teachers send out a recommended reading list of stories that parents can share with their children. These are new stories or stories that have already been shared in class.

In Reception parents are asked to read regularly with their child at home and make comments in their child's reading log. Children take home a phonics reading book and are also assigned books electronically (these are closely matched to their phonic knowledge). Alongside this, children take home a story book to share with an adult to develop their vocabulary, imagination and love of reading.

Wellbeing

We promote good oral health, as well as good health in general, in the early years by teaching the children about:

- Healthy eating
- Healthy living
- The importance of exercise
- The importance of brushing teeth (with a visit from the dentist)
- Good hygiene, including hand washing
- Looking after our bodies (including a visit from an optometrist)

For information about safeguarding in the EYFS, KS1 and KS2, please refer to our Safeguarding and Child protection Policy and Procedures, which is available on our school website or in hardcopy from the school office.