EARLY YEARS POLICY

At Blenheim Primary school we believe that learning in the early years should be primarily first hand, experiential, active and fun for our children. We will give young children opportunities and space to explore and discover in a secure environment. We recognise that although all children follow sequential patterns of development, every child is unique, having their own competencies which need to be brought out and built upon. Young children's learning should be embedded in what is familiar, involving play as an essential and rich part of the learning process. Learning should always be a pleasurable and rewarding experience, taking place in a social context. We encourage children's independence and autonomy with them taking responsibility for their learning as much as possible in an atmosphere of security and self-regulation. We also believe that young children learn best when their well-being levels are high.

Our curriculum is designed to recognise children's prior learning, both from previous settings and their experiences at home. We work in partnership with parents, carers and other settings to provide the best possible start at Blenheim, ensuring each individual reaches their full potential from their various starting points. Our curriculum has been designed to enable children to succeed through high expectations, cooperative and collaborative learning principles; as such Communication and Language, including Oracy, is at the heart of everything that we do. We recognise that oracy not only improves academic outcomes but is a life skill to ensure success beyond school, in life and future employment. Oracy develops children's thinking and understanding, which in turn promotes self-confidence, resilience and empathy which support the child's well-being. Our enabling environments of warm, skilful adult interactions support the children as they begin to link learning to their play and exploration. We believe that high level engagement ensures high level attainment. We therefore provide an engaging curriculum that maximises opportunities for meaningful cross-curricular links and learning experiences, as well as promoting the unique child by offering a mixture of pedagogical

approaches that are specific to our children's needs, including play and sustained thinking. By the end of the Reception year, our intent is to ensure that all of our children, regardless of their starting points, make rapid progress and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to have a smooth transition into Year 1 and the foundation stones for a successful and healthy life beyond. We are aiming high in the heart of the City!

Each half term, our staff introduce a new theme to provide inspiration for learning, whilst providing the flexibility for children to follow their own interests and ideas. Children learn through a balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities. The timetable is carefully structured so that children have directed teaching during the day. These sessions are followed by small focused group work. This means the teacher can systematically check for understanding, identify and respond to misconceptions quickly and provide real-time verbal feedback which results in a strong impact on the acquisition of new learning. Children are provided with plenty of time to engage in 'exploration' throughout the variety of experiences carefully planned to engage and challenge them in the provision. English and Reading is at the heart of our school and our aim is to encourage a love of reading right from the start. We expose our children to a range of books that not only develop a love of reading, but have been chosen specifically to develop their oracy, vocabulary and comprehension. Books will be embedded in our provision through activities, story sessions and on display for children to access independently. Through this, children begin to internalise new vocabulary, language patterns and begin to retell stories. There is cohesion and consistency with our approach to align with the whole school English Curriculum that is followed from Years 1-6. This includes the following:

- The inclusion of high-quality texts which are age and stage appropriate
- Modelled reading and re-telling opportunities across each session
- A focus on rich vocabulary
- Dedicated daily phonics sessions following a whole school approach to RWI
- Children are encouraged to read at home and are listened to regularly in school. They are given books that match their phonic knowledge in order for them to apply their learning with the aim of becoming successful, confident and fluent readers.

We believe that our Mathematics in the Early Years is high-quality and is provided via our learning environment and meaningful interactions with adults supporting children in developing mathematical thinking and discussion. Our children learn through a variety of pedagogical approaches which are then rehearsed, applied and recorded within their own child-led exploration. Children in Reception have daily teacher-led Math's sessions to develop fluency, revisit key concepts and address misconceptions. Our children develop a love of maths through games, songs, rhymes, and play using concrete manipulatives.

Our wider curriculum is taught through the learning areas: 'Understanding of the World' and 'Expressive Arts and Design.' EYFS staff have a good understanding of how ELG's feed into the National Curriculum through our robust planning and CPD opportunities. Subject leader colleagues throughout the school are also aware of the key ELG's that link to each foundation subject and the progression of the subject. Exciting, purposeful and contextual activities are planned to build on the children's natural curiosity. For example, building a house for their favourite toy enables them to think like a 'Scientist' and 'Engineer' as they explore a range of materials and test out their own ideas. Building further on our oracy focus, children will be encouraged to employ subject specific language and terminology in foundation subjects, and such vocabulary will be modelled, both verbally and orally, by supporting practitioners. Our inclusive approach means that we have a range of additional intervention and support for children who may not be reaching their potential, or are showing a greater depth of understanding and need further challenge. This includes, for example, sessions for developing speech and language, social skills, fine motor skills, phonics, and mathematics. In addition, we have a higher than average number of children on EHCPs, where bespoke plans have identified that learning may need to take place away from the classroom due to specific or sensory needs. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning by SLT and the EYFS leader ensure staff develop good subject knowledge. The EYFS leader ensures staff receive CPD specific to Early Years to develop their practice.

Prior to children starting, staff spend time speaking to the child's parents/carers, previous settings and read previous learning journeys to gain an understanding of the whole child and where they are at. This has a very positive impact upon the beginnings of very positive relationships with staff which in turn enables children to feel happy and settled at school very quickly. Research shows that when '...happiness and education are properly connected, a good education should follow, leading back to significant personal happiness.' (N.Noddings 2003:1)

During the first half term in Nursery or Reception, all staff use ongoing assessments, observations and conversations with the child and parents/carers to develop a baseline assessment. This ensures the identification of each individual's starting points in all areas which in turn enables staff to accurately plan experiences to ensure maximum progress.

The RBA (Statutory Reception Baseline Assessment) is carried out in the first term. This assessment focuses on 'Language, Communication and Literacy,' and 'Mathematics.' The impact of this is to show the progress children make from Reception until the end of KS2. It also supports with the summative half-termly teacher assessment and adds to the overall accuracy.

NELI (Nuffield Early Language Intervention) NELI is an evidence-based oral language intervention for children who show difficulties or weakness in their oral language skills and who are therefore at risk of experiencing difficulty with reading. The assessment informs us if the child is at expected for their age or requires intervention from trained NELI practitioners. This ensures that the correct children get the exacting intervention tailor made to their needs. This intervention is highly recommended by the EEF and shows, on average, a positive impact of 4+ months catch up.

Ongoing Observation: All ongoing observations are used to inform weekly planning and identify children's next steps. This formative assessment does not involve prolonged periods of time away from the children or excessive paper work. Practitioners draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgements through discussions with other practitioners, photographs and physical examples such as a child's drawing / making. Some observations are uploaded using Tapestry and shared with the supporting parents and carers. Other examples are kept in individual files; these are important for the impact of teacher-based assessments as this ensures appropriate levels of challenge are given to all.

Phonic assessments are carried out using a RWI tracker every half term to quickly identify pupils that are not making expected progress. The impact of this is that children to 'keep up' rather than 'catch up' where possible. Children that are making accelerated progress will be given challenge accordingly.

Summative assessments are completed three times per year and shared with parents, whereby the Class Teacher updates the progress children have made.

In Summer Term 2, the EYFSP is completed where teachers judge whether the child has met each of the 17 ELG's. They will be assessed as either 'emerging' or 'expected.' Whilst there is no judgement to state if a child is exceeding beyond an ELG, teachers have a duty to provide a narrative for both parents and the Year 1 teacher and therefore report to the if a child is exceeding

expectations. Impact is also evident through our successful transitions into Year 1. EYFS staff have a good understanding of how ELG's link to the National Curriculum, and through our robust planning and delivery across the spectrum of subjects – both core and foundation. The impact of this is that the children leave the EYFS stage with the skills, knowledge and confidence to continue their journey into KS1 as prepared and ready as they possible can be.

Our Pedagogy:

To ensure that we enable ALL of our children to learn, we have a specific pedagogy that arises from a wide-range of different approaches to ensure that our children thrive during their time at Blenheim. We always:

1. Model one thing well (concept, skill or attitude) using clear explanation and metacognition.
2. Give high quality feedback through a range of questioning strategies including scaffolded questions, coaching, mini plenaries and written feedback, which deepens children's understanding.
3. Differentiate to enable access for all, swift progress and appropriate challenge.
4. Have high expectations of learning and learning behaviours.
5. Provide the 'big picture' creating links to previous, current and future learning.
6. Develop love of learning through teacher enthusiasm, good subject knowledge, positive relationships and children's active involvement and collaboration.

Foundation Stage Curriculum

We adhere to the revised framework (2021) and have devised a curriculum that is both in line with age-related expectations of child development, but is also specific to the needs of our children. We also follow the 7 guiding principles that shape and guide practice within our Early Years setting. These are:

1. The best for every child

• All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.

• High-quality early education is good for all children. It is especially important for

children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

• When they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months behind their peers. We need to do more to narrow that gap.

• Children who have lived through difficult experiences can begin to grow stronger when they experience high quality early education and care.

• High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.

2. High-quality care

• The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every Practitioner within our setting

. Our young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.

• High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner enjoys spending time with young children.

• Effective practitioners are responsive to children.

• Practitioners understand that young children are learning to be independent, so they will sometimes get frustrated.

• Practitioners know that starting school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

3. The curriculum: what we want children to learn

• The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.

• Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.

• The curriculum is ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.

• Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.

• Young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.

• Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a

superficial way.

4. Pedagogy: helping children to learn

• Children are powerful learners. Every child can make progress in their learning, with the right help.

• Our effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching (see our school pedagogy for further details)

• Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children's learning.

• Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.

• Older children need more of this guided learning.

• A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.

5. Assessment: checking what children have learnt

• Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence.

• Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.

• Accurate assessment can highlight whether a child has a special educational need and needs extra help.

• Before assessing children, it's a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.

• Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

6. Self-regulation and executive function

• Executive function includes the child's ability to:

hold information in mind, focus their attention, regulate their behaviour and plan what to do next.

• These abilities contribute to the child's growing ability to self-regulate:

focus their thinking, monitor what they are doing and adapt, regulate strong feelings, be patient for what they want and bounce back when things get difficult.

• Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and plan ahead.

7. Partnership with parents

• It is important for parents and early years settings to have a strong and respectful partnership. This sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years.

• This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress.

• The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.

• Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.

• It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children

Inclusion

All children and their families are valued and treated fairly at Blenheim regardless of race, gender, religion or ability. Children are treated as individuals and have equal access to all provision that is available. All children are encouraged to achieve their personal best and planning is adapted to meet the needs of all groups and abilities. Early identification of special needs is crucial to enable staff to support the development of each child. Concerns are always discussed with parents at an early stage and the schools SENCO (special educational needs coordinator) is called upon for further information and advice.

Positive Relationships

At Blenheim we recognise that children learn to be strong, confident and independent from being in secure relationships. We always aim to develop caring, respectful,

professional relationships with the children and their families. Positive relationships are the backbone to everything that we do in the Early Years,

Parents as Partners and the Wider community

At Blenheim we recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value the contributions and support that they give their child and us. This process is developed and strengthened by:

- Induction Meetings where our aims are presented to, and discussed with, the parents.
- Our Induction Process, offering both parents and children the opportunity to spend time in the Foundation Stage before starting school.
- Always operating an open-door policy for parents with any queries.
- Offering two parent evenings throughout the course of the year.
- Displaying the children's fantastic work in the classroom and ensuring that parents/carers are made aware of this.
- Holding workshops for parents throughout the year, offering support with the EYFS new curriculum, Reading, phonics (Read, Write, Inc), Mathematics and discussing with parents' successful transition in to Year 1
- Sharing the children's 'Learning Journey's' with the parents and valuing the on-going contributions to these from parents.
- Developing a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between the child, school and parents. (Parent events and Open sessions, parent groups).

Before a child starts at Blenheim Primary School or nursery, parents will be home visited and asked to complete a 'starting school sheet'. This document provides the teacher with valuable information regarding the children's level of development, likes/dislikes, health concerns and family background. Sharing this information allows the parents to raise and share any concerns that they may have regarding their child starting school or nursery and begins to form the close link between the teacher and the child.

We have developed strong links with the large number and variety of Pre-schools and Nurseries that feed into Blenheim. The Foundation Stage Staff meet with all providers to discuss each individual child and their transition into school or nursery, at their setting and through Cluster meetings throughout the year.

Three areas (**Prime Areas**) are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The **Prime Areas** are:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development.
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development.

Children are supported through the four **Specific Areas** through which the three Prime Areas are strengthened and applied.

The **Specific Areas** are:

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

The way in which the child engages with other people and their environment underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. The **Characteristics of Effective Learning** are:

- Playing and Exploring
- Active Learning
- Creating and thinking critically.

Observation, Assessment and Planning

Foundation Stage staff (Teachers and Teaching Assistants) use observations of the children's learning as well as our own curriculum of key skills as the basis for planning. Foundation Stage Staff are skilled at observing children to identify their achievements, interests and next steps for learning. These observations then lead the direction of the planning and ensure that the children's interests are explored and developed. This fostering of the children's interests develops a high level of motivation for the children's learning.

Collaboration

The Foundation Stage leader (cascading to all FS team) meets with fellow colleagues from schools in our trust and builds upon current good practice. This very successful initiative has provided opportunities for the Foundation Stage staff to work together in a very productive and efficient way. Through this, we have recognised our strengths, and set yearly targets, which will directly benefit the children. This is an on -going tool that we use to channel and plot the development of our good practice. It also enables us access to differing levels of experiences that can aid us in our every- day practice. The staff between our trust schools also meet termly to moderate the children's learning and development.

Resources

Provision of learning resources will be reviewed at least every term to ensure that equipment is in good condition and replaced or updated as necessary and as resources

allow. If any member of staff or helper becomes aware of any health and safety issue they should stop children using that equipment or area and inform the class teacher as soon as possible. The class teacher will then inform the FS lead. Specific areas are checked through our on-going daily health and safety check to ensure that all areas are clean, safe and appropriate for use by all of the children.

Staffing

Teaching staff

The ratio of teaching staff is kept as high as finances allow. TA's within the unit are used to support children's learning, working alongside teaching staff. They are expected to work under the direction of the class teacher, following verbal and written directions given to them on daily or weekly planning sheet. At all times they should help support children achieve learning intentions in as independent a manner as is possible at their stage of development. TAs are expected to report back to teaching staff noting success as well as concerns either verbally or through the feedback column on the weekly planning sheets and observation assessments.

Admissions

Children are admitted to school following the procedures outlined in our Schools Admissions Policy (See the Policy for more details). All the children, regardless of when their birthday is within the specific academic year, will begin school at the start of September. We offer a staggered entry in September to enable us to suit a child's individual needs.

Ofsted 2019 stated that:

> ... The very effective development of children in Nursery and Reception, from their starting points, is the foundation stone of the very strong progress pupils go on to achieve by the end of Year 6. This should not be underestimated. Children benefit from excellent teaching, a language-rich curriculum and exceptional care, guidance and support. Leadership of early years has proved highly effective in ensuring that the priorities are the right ones to ensure the very best outcomes for the children.

This policy has been assessed for equality and will cater for all children by not discriminating on the bases of protected characteristics.