

EYFS Policy & Philosophy

At Sycamore Academy, all teaching staff deliver an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum through immersion in high quality teaching alongside an enriched environment.

Our philosophy is to nurture every child's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, developing both skills and confidence as they take their first steps on their own unique journey of lifelong learning.

At Sycamore Academy, the EYFS welcomes children from the age of 2 to 5. Parents and carers can apply for their child to join our 2 year old provision (Seedlings) where they will be offered up to 15 hours across 5 days (AM or PM sessions of 3 hours) if they meet certain criteria with regard to benefits and working hours. Further information is available online. At 3, children then progress through to our nursery (Saplings) where they will be offered up to 15 hours across 5 days (AM or PM sessions of 3 hours). In preparation for children moving to reception parents are asked to complete the school admissions application. Children will be in the reception classes (F2B and F2Y) for the school year in which they turn 5 after which, they will move from the EYFS into Key Stage 1.

Early Years at Sycamore Academy

This document provides an overview of the policy, philosophy and practice in the EYFS at Sycamore Academy. It outlines our intentions in the EYFS and how we implement this within our provision.



The child is endowed with unknown powers, which can guide us to a radiant future. If what we really want is a new world, then education must take as its aim the development of these hidden possibilities.

Maria Montessori



Intent

The intent for our children is to enter the next stage of their education ready to tackle new challenges with confidence and a positive mindset. We aim to:

ENGAGE our pupils in a stimulating environment led by the children yet carefully organised and managed by adults, providing a curriculum responsive to individual starting points and needs.

INNOVATE our children to take the lead in their own learning, encouraging confidence to explore new ideas, think about problems, take risks, make links and seek challenge.

DEVELOP high levels of engagement, curiosity, collaboration and cooperation with children being highly adept at managing their own behaviour in the classroom and in social situations.

EXPRESS themselves with confidence in a meaningful way, respecting the opinions and values of themselves and others.

Implementation

Our approach is influenced by the work of educationalists, practitioners and other professionals who have guided our knowledge of how young children learn and how adults can support their development.

At Sycamore Academy provision is underpinned by a complementary relationship between adult led, adult initiated and child led learning.

We are ambitious in our approach using a continuous cycle of observation and assessment, planning and teaching, alongside structured and systematic lessons and guided group work.

Shared Input

During the day there are whole group sessions (Seedings/Saplings x1, F2 x 3) covering the specific areas of literacy, maths and phonics using supporting documents, such as 'Birth to 5 Matters', phonics programme guides and Sycamore Academy's EYFS Curriculum.

Adult led focused groups

Short focused groups are planned to follow a shared input. These sessions are planned with care, meeting the needs of all children, using prior knowledge of the child's learning experiences and guidance from 'Birth to 5 Matters'

Continuous Provision

Indoor and outdoor resources are organised to develop children's skills in personal interaction and exploration and are linked to current assessment data, topics and children's own interests. Resources are carefully selected to meet the development needs of the children in order to enhance potential for new learning and consolidate prior learning. Resources are dressed/displayed to reflect children's interests.

Creative people are curious, flexible, persistent and independent with a tremendous spirit of adventure and a love of play.

Henri Matisse

Continuous provision transcends all areas of learning and provides children with the opportunity to demonstrate the three characteristics of effective learning. Children are given the freedom to make independent choices and are encouraged to be active learners and take control of their own learning.

“High-level attainment comes from high-level engagement.”

Alistair Bryce-Clegg, 2015

Assessment

Throughout ‘continuous provision’, observation forms a fundamental aspect of the pedagogy of EYFS at Sycamore Academy

“Young children demonstrate language, mathematics, science, creativity, physicality – sometimes all within one activity – and the task of the practitioner is to make sense of what is seen, to recognise any significant steps in learning that may have taken place and to identify where help and support are needed to make further progress” (Jan Dubiel, 2014)

Observations and responding to children’s thinking inform our planning of experiences and opportunities, how we create our environment for thinking, the strategies the adults use to extend learning (modelling, scaffolding, questioning, discussion, shared sustained thinking) and how we capitalise knowledge of children’s interests to ensure high levels of engagement.

All adults record ‘Wow!’ moments – when a child does or says something that demonstrates progress or skill in a particular area.

Summative Assessments

In addition to the continuous cycle of observation and formative assessment which informs each child’s next steps, summative assessments are carried out for phonic development, literacy and maths and an assessment of each child’s stage of development for each of the 7 areas of learning. These take place termly and inform planning of subsequent teaching and learning. Assessments are moderated and recorded to ensure every child makes progress in line with, and beyond, expectation.



“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. For children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

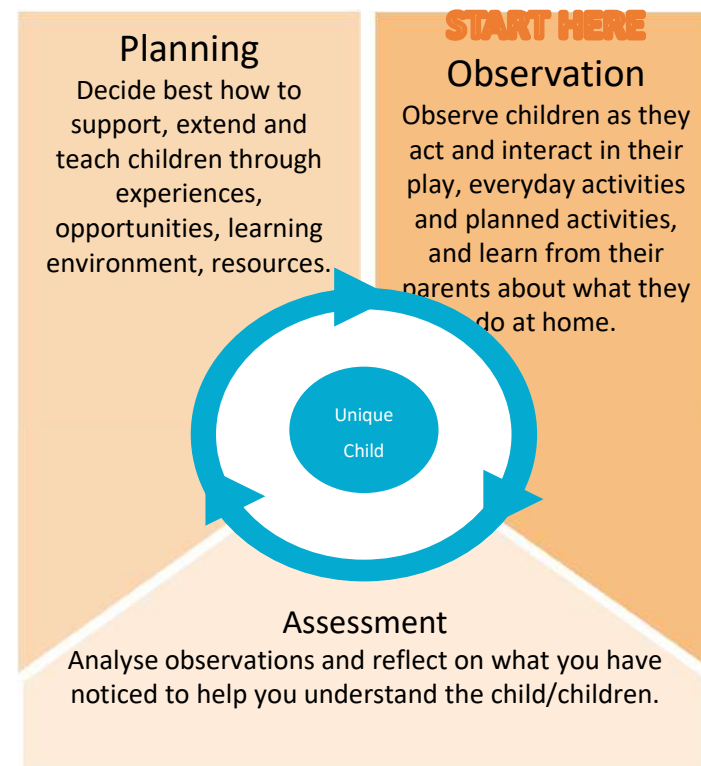
Fred Rogers

Recording

Each class has a Class Dojo page which allows parents and carers to see the learning which has taken place. Within Class Dojo every child has a personal profile which contains the ‘wow!’ moments recorded by staff. These are available at school and at home with every parent and carer being given free access when their child joins Sycamore Academy.

2 Year Check

All children in the 2 Year Provision will have a 2 Year Progress Check which is shared with parents and the child's Health Visitor



The Role of the Adult

Research shows that progress will be significantly enhanced by the effective support and role modelling of adults within the learning environment.

At Sycamore Academy the role of the adult, particularly during time spent with continuous provision, is based on sustained shared thinking.

Within the setting interactions between adults and children will look like this:

- Tuning in to what is happening or a child's thinking
- Showing genuine interest
- Respecting children's own decisions and choices
- Inviting children to elaborate
- Recapping on what has happened so far
- Offering personal experience
- Clarifying ideas
- Reminding
- Using specific praise
- Offering an alternative viewpoint
- Speculating ("I wonder if...")



The Role of the Environment

The importance of each adult to support progression is crucial however, when a child is on the own learning journey the environment plays a significant role in their development.

At Sycamore Academy each area of the classroom is informed by assessment. As the needs and interests of the children change, grow and develop, so too will the learning environment.

Using open ended resources encourages creativity, imagination and thinking skills and also encourages children to broaden vocabulary as they explain their choices.

Our timetable allows for long periods of uninterrupted access to continuous provision to give children enough time to reach a deep level of involvement as they engage, play, investigate and talk.

The Outdoors

Children have extended and regular access to our wonderful outdoor areas. Outdoor learning spaces are deconstructed with children being given access to open ended resources such as planks, logs and pine cones to encourage creative thinking and imaginative play.

Children have regular access to other outdoor areas such as open playing fields, playgrounds, and woodland to support learning in other areas of the curriculum such as exploring the natural world and recognising changes in nature over time.

"Play is the highest form of research."

Albert Einstein



The EYFS Framework

At Sycamore Academy we follow the EYFS Statutory Framework (2021). Within this framework there are four guiding principals which shape our practice.

These are:

1. **Every child is a unique child**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.

2. Children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**.

3. Children learn and develop well in **enabling environments** with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.

4. Children **develop and learn at different rates**. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

EYFS Learning and Development

Requirements

Our curriculum encompasses seven areas of learning and development. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. Three areas are particularly important for building a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships, and thriving.

These are called the prime areas:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social, and emotional development.

Four areas help children to strengthen and apply the prime areas.

These are called the specific areas:

- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

“The education of even a very small child does not aim at preparing him for school but for life”

Maria Montessori

Throughout their time in the EYFS our children partake in an ambitious curriculum which is designed in a sequential way to ensure progress towards the end of foundation goals. These goals are defined as Early Learning Goals (ELGs) The descriptors for these can be found in the appendix.

As previously outlined our curriculum incorporates learning through play, learning by adults modelling, by observing each other and through guided learning and direct teaching. It is also important to highlight that our plans are flexible to allow us to respond quickly to children's new interests and/or needs.

Weaving throughout the EYFS curriculum at Sycamore Academy are three **Characteristics of Effective Learning**.

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

These elements underpin how we reflect on each child's development and adjust our practice accordingly. Supporting children in their individual learning behaviour and observing the context of children's play is essential.



Oracy at Sycamore Academy

Speaking and Listening

The way that we communicate with each other is the foundation on which we build relationships at school and throughout our lives. The importance of positive, purposeful communication is key to us at Sycamore Academy and speaking and listening is the backbone of all that we do. Children have clear and accurate spoken language modelled throughout the EYFS and are encouraged to communicate with each other in an age appropriate way from their first days in the setting. How to ask and answer questions, how to speak clearly in full sentences and how to take turns at speaking and listening in

conversations are all carefully and consistently modelled on a daily basis.

As well as speaking and listening children are exposed to a broad and rich vocabulary through modelled language, shared stories and a variety of in-school and off-site experiences.

Reading at Sycamore Academy

Book Based Learning

Children's learning is based on quality books, rhymes and poems which they are introduced to over their time in the EYFS. There is also a set of books, rhymes and poems which we have identified for all children in our setting to hear many times.

Phonics

Systematic synthetic phonics is taught using the Read Write Inc. scheme. Small group teaching takes place daily throughout EYFS.

Pre-phonics skills are taught throughout the EYFS and include:

- Environmental sounds
- Instrumental sounds
- Body percussion (stamping, clapping etc)
- Rhythm and rhyme
- Alliteration
- Voice sounds

Typical activities at this stage include environment walks, playing and identifying instruments, action songs, rhymes and playing games like 'I Spy'. These activities aim to develop children's listening, vocabulary and speaking skills prior to, and alongside, the introduction of explicit phonics teaching.

Later, phonics teaching takes place which is focused on learning the letter sounds, letter formation, blending (putting letter sounds together to read and write words), segmenting (breaking sounds apart to read a word) and 'Red Words' (words which occur frequently but have irregular spellings, such as 'who' and 'I')

Formative assessment takes place during all phonics lessons, quickly identifying who has and has not understood a new phoneme, grapheme or 'Red word', informing future planning. Summative assessment takes place half termly in F2.

Knowledge of each sound is checked, as well as the child being able to apply this when reading words. Pupils who are making slow progress are identified quickly and intervention is immediately put into place, alongside the usual phonics teaching. Each phonics session is 20-40 minutes in duration and follows a teaching sequence which is implemented throughout the school ensuring transition to Key Stage 1 is seamless.

Writing at Sycamore Academy

Mark Making

Mark making and speech provide children with powerful tools for thinking, reasoning and problem solving.

Time, space and attention is given to children's mark making, mathematical graphics, drawing and writing experiences. Throughout each day, children have opportunities for spontaneous mark making, drawing and writing in both the indoor and outdoor environment. Resources are carefully chosen, well organised and attractively presented, so that the children can decide independently how they want to represent their ideas and which medium would best suit their purpose. Resources are also placed in key areas throughout the environment to support children in mark making for a variety of purposes. High value is placed upon imagination, ideas and self-expression demonstrated by the children, these are reflected by the adults and used as starting points for planning.

"Storytelling is an intrinsically human thing to do"

Karen Haven

Talk for Writing

Talk for Writing is a fun and creative approach developed by author, Pie Corbett, to teach writing. Talk for writing is split into 3 distinct learning parts. Starting with the 'Imitate' stage and the enjoyment of sharing stories. A pictorial story map is created, and the children learn to retell the story by heart using the story map, expression and actions for support. Next the children 'Innovate' the story, make it their own e.g. changing the character or the setting. Finally, the children re-write the story in the 'Invention' stage writing their own version independently.



Handwriting

Handwriting development in our EYFS includes a wide variety of activities planned to develop fine motor skills required for correct pencil grip. Activities may include threading, using tweezers, dough gym, weaving. The list is endless!

"Scribbles are products of a systematic investigation, rather than haphazard actions"

John Matthews

Once children have developed the strength for the correct pen grip, alongside their opportunities for spontaneous mark making which may not use recognisable letters, children will be taught how to form letters correctly. Adults will use the letters being taught during phonics sessions alongside Read Write Inc. ditties to teach letter formation. The first words usually written by children are their name and we practice this skill daily with children being given personalised direction on their next steps for improvement and targeted support for all aspects of handwriting.





Maths at Sycamore Academy

There's more to maths than counting!

Children learn about maths through play and their daily experiences. The more meaningful to them and hands on it is, the better.

Our setting is full of mathematical opportunities for children to explore, sort, compare, count, calculate and describe. This supports us in providing a safe environment to be creative, critical thinkers, problem solvers and to have a go which encourages children to discover independently.

Mathematics is identified as one of the specific areas of learning, alongside expressive arts and design, literacy, and understanding the world.

Our objective is to ensure that all children develop firm mathematical foundations in a way that is engaging, and appropriate for their age. This means actively learning using resources and activities provided in the environment.

In addition, maths is explicitly taught as short whole class sessions and followed up with small group work within the environment.

Concrete – Pictorial – Abstract

Mastery of mathematical concepts in the EYFS takes the following approach:

Concrete – children use concrete objects and manipulatives to help them understand what they are doing.

Pictorial – children build on this concrete approach by using pictorial representations. These representations can then be used to reason and solve problems.

Abstract – with the foundations firmly laid, children move to an abstract approach using numbers and key concepts with confidence

Maths is everywhere!

Here are a few examples of how our environment promotes mathematical development:

- Sand & Water can develop mathematical concepts and language, e.g. heavy, light, empty, full, big, little.
- Malleable – dough can develop mathematical language – short, long, fat, thin. Children can make shapes of different dimensions – flat shapes, 3-d shapes.

- Imaginative play - set the table for dinner can develop counting skills. Sorting clothes into different colours, or different types of clothes, e.g. t-shirts and socks will develop knowledge of shapes and colours.
- Physical play can develop fine motor skills e.g. Sorting out a jigsaw, threading beads. Block play or playing with toy cars can help to develop sequencing according to size, colour. Playing with different sized blocks can help to develop an understanding of weight and dimensions. Tidying toys allows children to sort into different sizes and colours. It can also develop mathematical language – first, second, third, how many are blue?, which is largest / smallest?
- Outdoors – Children may plant seeds which can develop understanding of time and the life cycle of plants. As the plants grow children use measures and develop mathematical language of size.
- Books & Rhymes - Enjoying stories and rhymes with a mathematical element, e.g. “One-two buckle my shoe” can develop number concepts, knowing direction that the print reads from left to right.

Learning maths is more like taking a meandering nature walk than like climbing a ladder of one-topic-after-another. Kids need to wander around the concepts, notice things, wonder about them and enjoy the journey.

Parent Engagement

Parents are the first and most important influence on their child's development and future outcomes.

Children have two main educators in their lives – their parents and their teachers. Therefore, the school and the parents all have crucial roles to play. The impact on a child's education is greater if parents and schools work in partnership.

We pride ourselves on building positive relationships with the families of Sycamore Academy and create a strong relationship between children, parents and practitioners. We understand that when parents relinquish part of the care and teaching of their child to the staff in our setting it is a big step.

We create an environment that is conducive to interactions where all feelings can be taken into account.

A warm welcome each day often leads to a deeper knowledge and understanding of each child and their family.



Impact

The current statistics show around 70% of our children leave the EYFS with a Good Level of Development (GLD). This is in line with the most recent national expectation in the UK.

Children enter Key Stage One ready to begin the next chapter of the educational journey. They are equipped with a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for future progress through school and life.

In 2017, a 'Study of Early Education and Development: Good Practice in Early Education' was published which outlined 3 themes that underpin effective practice that are aligned with our ethos and development.

At Sycamore Academy we;

- 1. Tailor practice to the needs of the children** - the child is at the centre of our practice. We have a clear vision of what we want to achieve for the children in our care, and these clear goals inform all areas of our practice.
- 2. Invest in skilled and experienced staff** - that support children to reach their full potential.
- 3. Operate an open and reflective culture** – driven by continuous improvement. We seek out other settings and professionals to learn from, share and reflect practice. We recognise the knowledge and expertise of our own staff and value open discussion and staff consultation; and embedded within our school is a culture of self-evaluation as a means of driving continuous improvement.



"Learning and Caring Together"
Sycamore Academy motto



APPENDIX

The Early Learning Goal Descriptors

Communication and Language

ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversation when engaged in back- and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

ELG: Speaking

- Participate in small group, class and one-to- one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

ELG: Self-Regulation

- Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

ELG: Managing Self

- Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience, and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet, and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

ELG: Building Relationships

- Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

Physical Development

ELG: Gross Motor Skills

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing; Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping, and climbing.

ELG: Fine Motor Skills

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paint brushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.



Literacy

ELG: Comprehension

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems and during role-play.

ELG: Word Reading

- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending.
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

ELG: Writing

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

Mathematics

ELG: Number

- Have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number.
- Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5.
- Automatically recall (without reference to rhymes, counting or other aids) number bonds up to 5 (including subtraction facts) and some number bonds to 10, including double facts.

ELG: Numerical Patterns

- Verbally count beyond 20, recognising the pattern of the counting system.
- Compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity.
- Explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally.

Understanding the World

ELG: Past and Present

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society.
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

ELG: People, Culture and Communities

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and –when appropriate – maps.

ELG: The Natural World

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

Expressive Arts and Design

ELG: Creating with Materials

- Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools, and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.
- Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.
- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.

ELG: Being Imaginative and Expressive

- Invent, adapt, and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher.
- Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs; Perform songs, rhymes, poems, and stories with others, and – when appropriate – try to move in time with music.

Glossary

Adult-led learning – the practitioner knows exactly what outcomes they want to achieve. They have planned with care, using prior knowledge of the child’s learning experiences and guidance from the EYFS document ‘Development Matters’, 2012.

Adult-initiated learning – the practitioner has a clear purpose for planning an activity or experience. Knowledge of the child or children, and of their previous learning, gives the practitioner evidence to plan either for consolidation of that learning, or to explore its next steps.

Child-led learning – situations that evolve independently, the practitioner approaches not knowing what it is that the child or children are trying to do or what scenario they have been creating. Often spontaneous and frequently unpredictable. In this situation, the practitioner must wait and watch before deciding whether and when to intervene.

Synthetic Phonics - is a way of teaching reading. Pupils are taught to read letters or groups of letters by saying the sound(s) they represent. Pupils can then start to read words by blending (synthesising) the sounds together to make a word



Sycamore Academy
A L.E.A.D. Academy