



EARLY YEARS POLICY

This policy will be reviewed annually or in response to changes in legislation		
Created		Vice Principal
Last Review	January 2024	Early Year Leads, Head of Compliance
Approved	September 2023	Education Board

This Policy applies to the Early Years in all Thomas's Prep Schools.

Thomas's London Day Schools operates as a united group of schools with a similar ethos and values and as such is referred to as a singular body.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with Thomas's Admissions Policy, Attendance Policy, Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy, Behaviour Policy, Curriculum, Teaching & Learning Policy, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Policy, Allergens and Dietary Policy, Pupil Induction Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, SEND Policy, Supervision, Lost Child and Non-collection of Pupils Policy.

SCHOOL SUPPLEMENTS

[Thomas's Battersea Early Years Policy Supplement](#)

[Thomas's Clapham Early Years Policy Supplement](#)

[Thomas's Fulham Early Years Policy Supplement](#)

[Thomas's Kensington Early Years Policy Supplement](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Early Years applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. At Thomas's, the majority of children join the school at the beginning of the academic year in which they will turn five.

Pupils in the Early Years are very much a part of Thomas's and follow the ethos, aims and values of all year groups. However it is also acknowledged that the Early Years framework has many distinctive facets and by producing a specific Early Years (EY) policy we are recognising the importance of the Early Years Foundation Stage in its own right and its value in preparing children for later schooling.

The four principles of the EY set the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. These are:

- **A Unique Child:** every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured

- **Positive Relationships:** children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
- **Enabling Environments:** children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers
- **Learning and Development:** children develop and learn in different ways (see “the characteristics of effective teaching and learning” at paragraph 1.9) and 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.

For information about the SEND provision refer to the SEND Policy. Further details regarding how pupils with EAL are supported can be found in the EAL Policy.

2. AIMS

The aims in the Early Years are:

- for children to develop positive dispositions to their learning;
- for children to feel safe and comfortable in their learning environment;
- for children to form good relationships with adults and peers;
- for children to understand what is right, what is wrong and be able to make informed choices;
- for parents to put trust and confidence in the professionalism and experience of practitioners;
- for parents to feel secure about leaving their children in the setting;
- for parents to feel involved in their child’s development and learning and work in partnership with practitioners;
- for practitioners to be sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of children and parents at all times.

In addition the EY seeks to provide:

- quality and consistency in all early years settings, so that every child makes good progress;
- a secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly;
- partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers;
- equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each School has a Head of Lower School who has overall responsibility for pupils in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 and also an Early Years’ Leader who has direct leadership of the children in the Early Years Foundation stage.

4. PROCEDURES

4.1 Settling in

It is hoped that the transition from pre-school to Reception, for both children and parents, is as smooth as possible. The majority of children will have attended a form of Early Years setting prior to admission and it is acknowledged that these can vary in style and curriculum. Thomas's aims to take into account the wide range of life experiences and value the diversity of all children.

- All future Reception children and their parents are invited to school to meet their future classmates and teachers in the summer term before they are due to start at Thomas's.
- All children attend school for the morning only for the first few weeks of term to ease the transition to full time schooling.
- Children born between 1st May and 31st August have the option of doing a ½ day each Tuesday and Thursday during Michaelmas term.
- Each child is allocated a Key Person, of Level 6 qualifications or above, to respond to the child's needs and help them settle into their new environment. The Key person will also be the main point of contact for the parents. In the Reception classes the Key person will be the class teacher.
- Parents are invited to bring their children into the classroom each morning to settle them in.
- Parents are invited to an event during the first term, when practitioners talk through the day to day routines of the setting, curriculum, forthcoming events etc and where parents can meet some of the child's teachers.
- Practitioners are always able to discuss issues arising with parents at short notice.
- Each class has a designated PTA rep who acts as a liaison between the parent body and practitioners in Reception classes.

4.2 Parents and Carers as Partners

Thomas's recognises the vital role that parents have played and will continue to play in educating their child. This teamwork is supported by:

- inviting all parents to an induction meeting during the term before their child starts school;
- having an open door policy every morning where parents bring children into the classroom and have the opportunity to be part of their child's learning experience;
- encouraging regular communication between school and home through the child's planner;
- offering parents regular opportunities to talk about their child's progress and encouraging parents to talk to the child's teacher if there are any concerns; ;
- encouraging parents to regularly view and contribute to their child's Early Years profile;
- hosting various opportunities for parents to come into school, to read stories or talk to the class about specific cultural backgrounds or jobs they do;
- arranging a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between child, school and parents;

4.3 Learning and Teaching

Thomas's believes that children need to be involved actively in their learning, the process of which should be a rewarding, enjoyable and enriching experience. The EY Statutory Framework has three main characteristics of effective learning which are: Playing and Exploring, Active Learning and Creating and Thinking Critically.

There are seven areas of learning and development in the EYFS guidance. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, for building their capacity to learn and for forming relationships.

The prime areas are:

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

The four specific areas of learning which strengthen the prime areas are:

- Literacy;
- Mathematics;
- Understanding the world;
- Expressive arts and design.

Using these areas, practitioners plan activities and create enabling environments which allow children to initiate their own learning. This is done by:

- providing children with opportunities to initiate their own learning and to learn from each other;
- encouraging children to develop positive dispositions towards their learning;
- allowing children time to consolidate their learning;
- enabling children to develop a positive self-image;
- enabling children to learn through movement and use of all the senses;
- enabling children to make links in their learning;
- promoting the development and use of language;
- ensuring that play is progressive and matches children's level of development;
- using teacher expertise to gauge when it is appropriate to teach skills and knowledge directly;
- modelling a range of positive behaviour and promote rich language experiences;
- planning the indoor and outdoor learning environment in a manner appropriate to their level and which encourages purposeful play;
- working with parents in partnership and recognise their continued role in their child's development;
- undertaking skilful and well-planned observations to assess children's development and progress.

A fundamental part of the Early Years curriculum is based upon planned, purposeful play, with an appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities.

Children are encouraged to:

- explore and develop their own learning experiences;
- practise and develop their skills and ideas;
- learn how to control and extend themselves;
- understand the need for rules and responsibility

- think creatively alone and communicate with others to investigate and problem solve..

4.4 *The Learning Environment*

Within the learning environment:

- children's efforts are rewarded and commented on positively according to their differing levels of ability / experience;
- children's work is regularly displayed and celebrated;
- practitioners recognise the importance of allowing children time for sustained concentration across the broad range of learning experiences;
- mutual respect and trust is encouraged between children, parents and practitioners;
- practitioners regularly review the children's learning environment, both indoor and outdoor to ensure health and safety criteria are met;
- in accordance with Thomas's SEND and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policies, all children are included and not disadvantaged in terms of their gender, ethnicity, home language, SEN disability or ability;
- activities are planned to offer appropriate physical and sensory challenges;
- practitioners recognise that they have responsibility for encouraging and developing in the children an ability to express thoughts and ideas through conversation;
- practitioners provide a challenging play environment, which extends and develops children's experiences;
- practitioners use their knowledge of the children and their observational skills to plan appropriate teacher directed activities;
- play opportunities are planned and supported to allow the children to develop in all seven areas of learning;
- children are assessed through observation in groups and individually across their range of experiences to inform practitioners of attainments and to target areas for development and thus inform future planning;
- opportunities for children to learn from each other are encouraged;
- practitioners aim to organise the environment in an attractive stimulating way, which allows the children ease of access to resources that will aid their development in all areas of learning.

4.5 *Outdoor Play*

Outdoor play is seen as an essential part of the Early Years programme and the school aims to minimise the amount of time children spend being sedentary for extended periods. A carefully resourced outdoor learning area provides a multi-sensory learning environment, catering for individual learning styles, and offers children the chance to experiment with problem solving activities, collaborative tasks and child initiated learning opportunities.

Being active is important for children under five because it helps them build and maintain a good level of health and physical activity is critical to optimal growth and development. The early years are also an important time to establish habits relating to physical activity. As such, children of school age should be physically active each day for at least 180 minutes, spread throughout the day and should also be limited in the amount of time they spend sitting still (including in a car seat or pushchair). Screen

time should also be minimised (e.g. watching television, using a computer, tablet or smartphone).

The school's outdoors and sporting provision is fully inclusive of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those from different cultures and religions. All staff are aware of the need to be sensitive to individual beliefs about what is acceptable in relation to physical activity.

When developing outdoor provision members of staff follow the guidance from the Early Years programme:

- the outdoor and indoor environments contain resources and materials that children can explore and investigate using all their senses.
- some of the materials and resources should be familiar to the children from their home and community environments, and some should be new.
- the best materials have many uses, such as wooden hoops and pegs in a tin, with unlimited opportunities for children to use them creatively and imaginatively to support their learning and development.
- families are consulted and engaged in choosing the materials and resources the children use in a setting so that links can be made with home.
- the Learning Environment offers challenges through which children can learn about risk taking and keeping themselves safe.
- environments offer a variety of surfaces and levels, places to sit or lie, to climb or swing and to make big movements such as spinning, dancing, jumping, running and so on.
- adults support children's confidence in themselves and their developing skills as they tackle new experiences and develop a sense of what they can do and what they will be able to do as they practise and meet the challenges in the environment.
- children have opportunities to dig, to climb, to swing and to control wheeled toys. They should be able to touch and feel a variety of textures and to move, stretch and crawl. They may like to make marks, to cut and join materials together or to shape and construct materials.
- children are able to rest and refresh themselves when they are ready.
- children have time to play with what interests them and to make choices. They are given opportunities to watch the natural world changing, to explore and solve problems and to make friends and develop relationships.
- children are given time to learn and develop at their own pace.

To support the benefits of outdoor play members of staff will:

- aim to minimise the amount of time children spend being sedentary for extended periods;
- interact regularly with every child to encourage lots of movement throughout the day;
- present resources in a stimulating and attractive fashion;
- provide resources that compliment all 7 areas of learning with the EY;
- dress children appropriately for weather conditions;
- extend and interact children to develop thinking skills and learning opportunities;
- be positive role models for expected behaviour and expectations of play outdoors
- ensure the area is safe and secure, adhering to the Health and Safety policy and Risk Assessment in place;
- provide resources that allow children to self-select;

- raise parental awareness of the educational benefits of outdoor play;
- provide outdoor activity everyday;
- plan in a responsive and progressive manner to ensure a seamless continuation between the indoor and outdoor learning space;
- use the area to make relevant observations of the children, as individuals, to inform planning.

Members of staff promote healthy lifestyles and being physically active. Parents are encouraged to walk, scoot or cycle with their children for part or all the way to school and storage facilities for bicycles and scooters are provided. Events involving physical activity such as sports day are held regularly and exercise and outdoor learning are encouraged during the holidays.

In order for children to learn about managing risks associated with physical activity, they are offered stimulating and challenging environments; through which they are supported to explore and develop their own abilities and understanding. The level of risk is carefully managed so that children are not exposed to unacceptable dangers. Regular risk assessments are carried out and suitable arrangements are made for off-site visits to encourage children and their families to take advantage of the range of physical activities available within the local community.

4.5.1 Woodland Adventure

Our Woodland Adventure program aims to foster resilient, confident and creative learners through regular visits to a woodland setting over time. The experiences of Woodland Adventure provide a unique way of building confidence and self-esteem, learning new life skills and promoting independence, through hands-on learning experiences. The children enjoy a carousel of exciting activities that provide them with wonderful opportunities to explore, work together and experience the great outdoors. Each Woodland Adventure session is linked to the learning that takes place in the classroom and to the Enquiry learning your child is experiencing in school. Refer to the Outdoors Policy for further information.

4.6 Healthy Eating

Thomas's aims to establish good eating habits at an early age and is committed to promoting healthy eating in the Early Years. With this in mind, and by working alongside parents and carers, children are made aware of food that is good for them, what should be eaten in moderation and what is a rare treat, to encourage them to make healthy choices.

The School aims to:

- raise the awareness of nutrition;
- encourage and develop children's skills so they can make informed choices about food and drink;
- help children develop positive attitudes to diet, health and oral health;
- develop healthy eating and drinking activities that can benefit children, staff and parents/carers.
- teach the children about portion sizes and what makes up a healthy, balanced plate of food

Parents of pupils with particular dietary needs, due to medical conditions, allergies or religious faiths, should inform the school of these details before their child starts in Reception so that their needs can be catered for in line with the School's Allergens and Dietary Policy

Parents are encouraged to talk to their child's form teacher if they have any concerns about what, or how much their child is eating at school.

4.7 First Aid and Medical Care

Children in the Early Years who require First Aid or Medical care are treated following the procedures outlined in our First Aid and Medical Care Policies.

4.8 Progress and development

In the Early Years progress is informed by day-to-day observations made by the child's teachers and recorded as an online Learning Journey. In the summer term of Reception, the EYFS profile is completed for each child. Each child's level of development is assessed against the Early Learning Goals with practitioners stating whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are exceeding expected levels, or not yet reaching expected levels ('emerging').

When completing an EYFS profile for a pupil with SEND, reasonable adjustments will be made as appropriate.

The Early Years progress data is moderated annually across the Thomas's Schools and with the local authority.

The profile provides parents and carers, practitioners 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.

4.9 Transition to Key Stage 1

At the end of the Reception year, children are prepared to move from the Early Years stage to the more formal educational style of Key Stage 1. There are distinctive differences between the Early Years and KS1; however, children's personal independence, independent learning and the ability to choose activities and resources through decision-making continue to be promoted.

As part of the transition process a number of procedures are put in place.

- Ensuring children and parents are fully informed about the process of transition.
- Preparing Reception children during their Summer Term by increasing the amount of time spent in focused groups and working independently.
- Providing opportunities for children to spend time exploring their new class environment with their Reception teacher and assistant.
- Arranging for the children to meet and interact with their new teacher and assistant.

Information about each child will be passed onto the Year 1 teacher. Examples include:

- knowledge of sight words (high frequency words as set out in the Literacy Framework);
- knowledge of phonics and letters;
- reading ability and level;
- each child's last level assessed piece of writing, if applicable;
- maths ability and level;
- EY Learning Journeys/profiles;
- Foundation profile highlighting the targets achieved;
- previous reports and parents' evening records.

At the beginning of Year 1 (Michaelmas Term) staff will:

- use the EY Learning Journey to build upon children's learning and ensure the EY curriculum is provided for those who have not yet met their ELGs;
- provide a wide range of child initiated opportunities, set up within an exciting and stimulating classroom environment;
- ensure children continue to be active learners; particularly during Literacy and Numeracy sessions;
- provide opportunities for child-initiated play;
- continue to make observations of the children to inform assessments.

The Head, Reception and KS1 staff will work together, to transfer EYP, SEND, EAL and More Able information to set up groupings for Literacy and Numeracy to link ELGs and NCLD in Medium Term Plans using a thematic approach.

4.10 Supervision meetings for EYFS Staff

Supervision meetings enable staff to discuss issues and identify solutions as well as receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness. Supervision meetings are held between a manager and each staff member, including assistants, in order to support their roles. This is in addition to regular staff appraisals and other opportunities for staff training.

Staff are encouraged to share their thoughts and new ideas, with a consideration of future training and development of new skills.

Children's welfare, learning and progress is also discussed in pupil progress and welfare meetings held by the Safeguarding team.

5. LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This Policy bears due regard to the following statutory guidance and other advice.

DfE Statutory Guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (September 2023)

DfE 'Independent School Standards' (April 2019)

DfE 'Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage for group and school based providers' (December 2023)

DfE 'Early years qualification requirements and standards for group and school based providers, and awarding organisations and training providers offering qualifications in early years' (2024)

DfE 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 - 25' (January 2015)