



## Meopham Community Academy

### Continuation of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Your child has been part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) during their time at preschool or nursery and we continue to build on this throughout the first year at school. The EYFS has a set of expectations (or goals) that we aim for the children to achieve by the end of the Reception year.

#### Areas of Learning and Development

Three Prime Areas:

1. Personal, Social and Emotional Development (Making relationships, self-confidence and self-awareness, managing feelings and behaviour)
2. Physical Development (Moving and handling, Health and self-care)
3. Communication and Language (Listening and attention, Understanding and Speaking)

Four Specific Areas:

1. English (Reading and Writing)
2. Mathematics (Numbers and Shape, space and measures)
3. Understanding of the World (People and Communities, The World, Technology)
4. Expressive Arts (Exploring and using media and materials, Being imaginative)

The EYFS was constructed in response to research into brain development and our growing knowledge of how children learn best. We know that young children make learning connections in their brains much faster and better in an enriched environment. This means they flourish best in an environment which is engaging, exciting and full of adults who are interested in them – an environment where every sense is stimulated.

We also know that young children's brains are more active and more flexible than ours. With this in mind, the Foundation Stage of education is one where children are given stimulating, exciting experiences and where they become effective learners through playing, exploring, being active and being encouraged to create and think critically (having their own ideas and choosing their own ways to do things.)

Your child's Personal, Social and Emotional development is really the most important area of development in their early stages at school. We place great emphasis on ensuring that the children settle quickly and become familiar the routines and environment. Children that come into school who are happy, relaxed and confident will learn effectively. We bear this in mind when planning learning opportunities for your children.



## Communication and Language

Before a child can begin the complex skills of reading and writing, they need to make hundreds of thousands of links between their left brain and right brain. In order to develop these essential links between left and right brain, children need to be involved in activities using both sides of their bodies- both hands, both feet, both eyes and ears.

Rhythmic stamping, clapping, hopping, skipping, riding bikes and scooters are all vital in this development. Throwing, catching, hitting and bouncing balls, construction work, playdough, cutting and model-making are all very important.

The main focus within Communication and Language development is on a child's listening and attention, understanding and speaking. Research shows that most girls have sufficient links in their brains to begin the complex skills of reading and writing by the time they are approaching five years of age whilst in boys it is generally nearer six.

Learning to read is a gradual process, of which you have already started when you have been sharing stories, books and rhymes with your children at home. It's important that we continue this at school and at home - promoting real enjoyment of books. Establishing a real interest in books is the most important thing we can do both as teachers and parents and we would encourage you to help your child to memorise parts or whole stories if they can. They may be using pictures to retell a story or you may have read a favourite story more times than you can remember so that your child knows if you have missed a sentence (or page or 2!).

We also encourage the children to use their imagination in story telling. This also helps to develop their speaking and listening skills.

We have a daily phonics lesson using a programme called Read, Write Inc. where the children will engage in adult-led sessions and be introduced to the sounds that the letters in the alphabet make.

It is only when they are competently segmenting and blending the sounds (phonemes) in words that we will send home a book for them to read independently. This may not be until the end of the Reception year.

We also introduce the strategy of sight-recognition of whole words (common exception words). However we only use this for words which are difficult to segment and blend as it is well-known that a child's brain can become full of sight memory words by the age of seven and therefore they should be encouraged to learn to blend as many as possible and save the 'brain space' for more tricky words!

We offer a workshop for parents to explain this more fully in November once the children are settled in school.



## **Writing**

At Meopham Community Academy we teach the children to write using a cursive script (joined). Before we do this we ensure the children have developed sufficiently in many other areas. One very important area is the physiological development of the whole body or their gross and fine motor development. The children need to be able to do the 'big movements' before moving on to the smaller movements of pen onto paper.

We use a programme called '*Write-Dance*' as a way of developing the children's writing coordination skills through a combination of movement, dance, music and drawing in order to cultivate a personal, fluent, legible style of handwriting. The regular practise of the writing movements, in this way, ensures that the movements are learnt and those important links in the brain are made.

During '*Write-Dance*' the shapes of letters are played with in a creative and fun way, which both stimulates and motivates the children. All the movements involved with writing are practised to make shapes from straight lines to circles.

Alongside the '*Write-Dance*' programme the children learn how to write a progressive set of patterns which works towards joining cursive letter strings. We focus on these in our daily handwriting teacher-directed sessions.

As parents you can encourage gross and fine motor development by focusing on a good tripod grip of the pen or pencil, firm pressure, ability to colour in the lines and cutting along straight lines with scissors. We do not ask you to ensure your child can write their name before starting with us, however, if they can recognise it this would be useful for self-registration and finding their peg, personal items etc.

Ensuring we teach writing and the correct cursive letter formation at a developmentally-appropriate time offers benefits: children learn correctly and don't have to relearn.

We will begin the teaching of letter formation once we are confident that they have developed control over the formation of straight and curved lines. However, if your child can already write we will not discourage them.

## **Mathematics**

We focus on developing the children's understanding of mathematical concepts through a range of practical activities. It is also important for the children to 'talk' mathematics: to use appropriate vocabulary, which will indicate real understanding of the concepts we introduce.

We obviously investigate number in great detail; counting accurately, ordering number, recognising numerals, manipulating numbers and problem solving. We will introduce the concepts of addition and subtraction and develop the children's mental agility in manipulating number. For example quick mental recall of facts such as one more or one less than a number.



Other concepts we explore include naming and describing 2D shapes, recognising and creating patterns and the measurement of time, length, mass and capacity. All concepts are explored during teacher-led inputs and then our daily 'Mathsploring and Learning' sessions enable children to independently access a range of mathematics-based activities and to find out more for themselves. This will help the children develop the skills that will allow them to become more independent learners as they move up through the school.