



STEP Academy Trust

Early Years Policy

DATE OF POLICY: July 2015

Review: July 2018

Introduction

Early Years education is the foundation upon which young children build the rest of their schooling. It is a holistic education that encompasses all learning and development. Young children need an environment which is healthy, safe and secure, where they are able to grow in confidence and fulfill their potential. Each of our Early Years Foundation Stage [EYFS] classrooms across the Trust provides a stimulating environment where pupils can play, explore, experiment, develop confidence, be curious, and learn. We believe it is our duty to develop a joy of learning within our pupils, enabling them to feel motivated and excited by the opportunity to learn through play and first hand experiences. This policy outlines the purpose, nature and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) across The STEP Academy Trust.

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of practitioners working in the EYFS setting, including both teaching and non-teaching staff. In the policy, the term 'setting' refers to the Early Years educational provision within each of the STEP academies. The term 'practitioner' refers to the members of staff working with children within the setting.

To be read in conjunction with the following policies: Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Marking and Presentation, English, Maths, Science, Computing, Arts, PE, RE, MfL, SRE and relationships, RRS and Homework.

Aims of the Early Years Foundation Stage

In the EYFS setting across The STEP Academy Trust, we believe that all children are entitled to the best possible start in their Academy life, both intellectually and emotionally, spiritually and morally in order to enable them to develop their full potential.

We aim to support each child's welfare, learning and developmental needs by:

- Recognising that all children are unique and special.
- Understanding that children develop in individual ways and at varying rates - physically, cognitively, linguistically, socially and emotionally.
- Providing a safe, secure and caring environment where children feel happy and know that they are valued by the practitioners looking after them.
- Fostering and nurturing children's self-confidence and self-esteem through their developing awareness of their own identity and role within the community.
- Teaching them to express and communicate their needs and feelings in appropriate ways.
- Encouraging children's independence and decision-making, supporting them to learn through their mistakes.
- Developing children's understanding of social skills and the values and codes of behaviour required for people to work together harmoniously.
- Supporting children to develop care, respect and appreciation for others, including those with beliefs, cultures and opinions which differ from their own.
- Understanding the importance of play in children's learning and development.
- Providing learning experiences in play which reflect children's personal interests and areas of curiosity in order to encourage and develop their natural desire, interest, excitement and motivation to learn.
- Providing experiences which build on children's existing knowledge and understanding in order to challenge, stimulate and extend their learning and development.

- Providing effective learning opportunities in a range of environments, inside and outside.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework

Teaching in the EYFS setting is delivered in accordance with the government's statutory document 'The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (March 2012). This document is a principled approach to Early Years education, bringing together children's welfare, learning and development requirements through four themes: 'A Unique Child', 'Positive Relationships', 'Enabling Environments' and 'Children Learn in Different Ways and at Different Rates'.

The curriculum is centred on 3 prime areas of learning:

1. *Communication and Language*
2. *Physical Development*
3. *Personal, Social and Emotional Development*

Providers must also support activities through four specific areas which strengthen the prime areas.

These are:

1. *Literacy*
2. *Mathematics*
3. *Understanding of the World*
4. *Expressive Arts and Design*

These areas of learning and development address children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development. No one aspect of development stands in isolation from the others as all the areas of learning are closely interlinked. This ensures the delivery of a holistic, child-centred curriculum which allows children to make lots of links between what they are learning. All areas of learning are given equal weighting and value. Throughout The STEP Academy Trust, we believe that Early Years education is important in its own right and should not be viewed simply as preparation for the next stage of children's education. We believe that the EYFS framework allows a natural progression into the National Curriculum at the beginning of Year 1.

Active Learning through Play: We recognise that young children learn best when they are active. We understand that active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods. Therefore, we believe that Early Years education should be as practical as possible and our EYFS setting has an ethos of learning through play. We recognise the importance of children's play. It is an essential and rich part of their learning process, supporting them in all areas of development. Play is a powerful motivator encouraging children to be creative and to develop their ideas, understanding and language. Play is also flexible and able to suit the preferred learning style of the child. It can provide multiple ways for children to learn a variety of different skills and concepts.

In the EYFS settings across the Trust, practitioners provide both structured and unstructured play opportunities; inside and outside. These activities are designed to engage children in practical, first-hand experiences which will support them to discover, explore, investigate, develop their personal interests and areas of curiosity, and help to make sense of the world around them as they begin to understand specific concepts. Play opportunities are also set up to provide children with opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge, demonstrating their skills and level of understanding. In providing these active learning opportunities through play we understand the central position of play within the EYFS framework. This is essentially a play based curriculum and pedagogy as the provision of play opportunities underpins its delivery within settings.

Assessment and Record Keeping: Ongoing assessment is an essential aspect of the effective running of the EYFS settings across The STEP Academy Trust. Regular, planned and focused assessments are made of children's learning and individual needs. A record of each child's progress in all areas of their learning is kept by retaining and filing their assessment data. The main EYFS assessment method is through practitioners' observations of children in different teaching and learning contexts, including both adult

focused activities and child initiated play. Observations take place on a daily basis (both formally and informally).

Practitioners make time to carry out planned observations of individuals and groups of children regularly. They also make spontaneous observations in order to capture significant moments of children's learning. Observations are recorded in different formats (e.g. narrative style, post-it notes, whole class grids, photographs, using the 2Simple software package). All practitioners are involved in observing children. Practitioners use observations to support their developing knowledge of individual children. It informs them of children's abilities, needs, interests, play schemes and learning styles. Observations are evaluated, children's learning priorities are identified and relevant learning opportunities are planned to support children to make the next steps and progress.

Other methods of assessing children in the EYFS setting include engaging alongside children in their play, annotation of children's written work, talking with children about their task or play and in learning journals, that record children's progress over the academic year in all areas of learning. Samples of children's work are gathered, along with photographic evidence and observations and provide a valuable journey of the learning that has taken place for each child. Parents/carers and children are encouraged to contribute to these journals over the course of the year.

Baseline assessment is carried out during the children's first six weeks upon entering the setting. Judgements made on children's development are based on practitioners' evidence of children's behaviour observed independently and consistently in their self-initiated activities across all areas of learning and development. There is continuous monitoring and assessment of each child's development using the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (2012). This is updated at least once each term to track individual progress. At the end of the year it provides a summary of every child's development and learning achievements.

Planning: The EYFS framework provides a long term plan to follow by ensuring that all Early Learning Goals are covered throughout the academic year. Medium term planning is created with all Early Years practitioners' involvement and takes into account the individual children's learning and developmental needs. All areas of learning and development are planned for and available to access within the setting. The learning opportunities provided include a range of adult focused and child initiated activities indoors and outdoors. Educational visits within the local community and further afield are also planned to support children's learning within the classroom.

Admissions:

Nursery - Parents are encouraged to apply for a Nursery place for their child after their second birthday. Application forms for admissions are available from each Academy office and Nursery places are allocated during the Summer Term. Parents who are unsuccessful at gaining a place are placed on a waiting list.

Reception - Parents of children who require a Reception place must apply to the Local Authority where the academy is located. From September 2014, applications must be made on line, please see The STEP Academy Trust Admissions Policy for details. All prospective parents are invited to visit the academies and are taken on an informal tour by our Pupil Advocates (Year 6 children) and/or a member of staff. A prospectus is available to all prospective parents. Once pupils have accepted a place they are invited to a New Parents meeting which is held towards the end of the summer term; separate meetings being held for children starting in Nursery and in Reception. Before children start Nursery or Reception, they will be invited to visit their class with their parents. Staff use the visits as an opportunity to start pupils' profiles and gather important information about the pupil.

Parents as Partners: Throughout The STEP Academy Trust we recognise the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents, as highlighted by the EYFS framework. We understand that an effective partnership between Academy and home will have a positive impact on children's learning and development. Practitioners endeavour to encourage the regular sharing of information about the children with parents. We value the role of parents as children's primary educators. Through questionnaires and

informal chats at the beginning and end of the day, practitioners encourage parents to share their unique knowledge of their child, providing further insight into the child as an individual (e.g. characteristics, interests, experiences, likes, dislikes). This supports practitioners in establishing interesting and stimulating learning experiences, responding to children's needs and interests.

Parents are kept informed of what is happening in the setting through regular letters, reading records and informal chatting at the beginning and end of the day. This also gives suggestions of how parents can support their children's learning at home; consolidating and building on what has been covered in the setting. Parents are invited to attend parents' evenings during the course of the academic year. The first of these takes place during the autumn term to allow practitioners and parents to discuss how children have settled into the setting. Another parent's evening takes place during the spring term where practitioners will feedback on children's learning and development progress.

Parents are also invited to get involved with Academy life. There are opportunities for them to help with activities such as educational visits and reading, as well as offering their particular skills (e.g. cooking, art, music) to support children's learning. Parents may be invited into the setting on other occasions such as open afternoons where children show them their work. Each setting is committed to providing a friendly, open-door ethos and practitioners are available to talk to parents at the beginning and end of the day. Parents are always welcomed into our Academies and encouraged to discuss any concerns they might have.

Equal Opportunities

All practitioners have a responsibility to maintain positive attitudes to diversity and difference, ensuring that inclusive practice is delivered in the EYFS setting. All children, irrespective of gender, ability, special educational need, ethnicity, culture or religion, and social circumstances, have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development within the EYFS settings across the Trust.