Early Years Foundation Stage Policy

Introduction

“Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years, and a child’s experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right.” *(Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage)*

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. At Sandal Primary School, children can join our Nursery class the term after they turn 3 in September, with a further intake in January, subject to space availability. Children join the Reception class in September of the academic year in which they turn five. In active partnership with parents and carers, we enable our children to become confident, resilient, and active learners for life.

Early childhood is the bedrock upon which children build the rest of their lives. At Sandal Primary School, we deeply value the role of the EYFS in laying secure foundations for future learning, holistic development, and well-being. We believe early childhood is valid in its own right; the EYFS is a meaningful preparation for life, not merely a stepping stone to the next stage of compulsory education.

Our Mission Statement

"We are enthusiastic about providing a responsive, safe, and aspirational environment that challenges, encourages, and inspires curiosity for all our children. We are committed to maintaining a caring, stimulating atmosphere that nurtures confidence, self-esteem, respect, and independence to support early learning and development."

Sandal Primary School is an inclusive community where everyone is treated equally, valued, and respected. We support children to become independent, collaborative, and reflective learners. We deliver a broad, balanced, and ambitious curriculum that enables each child to develop personally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, creatively, and intellectually.

By centring our practice on what each child *can* do, we assess individual needs to promote progress from their unique starting points, including children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We work in close partnership with parents and carers to build a strong foundation for excellent behaviour, joy in learning, and safe exploration.

Rationale

This policy outlines the statutory aims, principles, and pedagogical themes adhered to at Sandal Primary School. It promotes consistency, high standards, and a shared understanding across our EYFS setting. It integrates curriculum design, parental partnership, safe transition pathways, and robust safeguarding strategies to protect and nurture every child in our care.

Aims & Principles

The EYFS framework is underpinned by four core principles that guide our practice:

- **A Unique Child:** Every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- **Positive Relationships:** Children learn to be strong and independent through secure, loving, and respectful relationships with parents and practitioners.
- **Enabling Environments:** High-quality indoor and outdoor environments respond to the child's individual interests and extend their learning.
- **Learning and Development:** Children develop and learn at different rates and in different ways, across seven interconnected areas of learning.

A Unique Child & Inclusive Practice

We value the diversity of individuals within our school and believe that every child matters. All children are treated fairly, with equal access to our full early years provision. We adapt our environments and planning to meet the needs of all groups, setting realistic but challenging expectations so that every child can achieve their full potential.

We identify Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at the earliest opportunity. Early intervention is crucial; concerns are proactively discussed with parents/carers, and we work closely with the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDCo) and external agencies in accordance with our *Inclusion and SEND Policy*.

We meet individual needs and remove barriers to learning by:

- Planning learning experiences that build upon children's prior knowledge, cultural capital, and unique interests.
- Utilising a wide range of responsive, multi-sensory teaching strategies.
- Providing a safe, supportive environment where diverse backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, and family structures are actively celebrated, free from stereotypes.
- Monitoring progress rigorously to implement timely support or challenge.

Positive Relationships: Parents as Partners

We recognise that parents and carers are a child's first and most enduring educators. We foster strong, professional partnerships through:

- **Induction Meetings & Handbooks:** Providing comprehensive handbooks and information sessions before starting Nursery or Reception.
- **Home & Setting Visits:** Offering home visits by the class teacher and family support worker to bridge the connection between home and school in a familiar environment.
- **Open-Door Policy:** Maintaining transparent communication. Practitioners discuss achievements or progress concerns early and directly with parents.
- **Tapestry Online Learning Journeys:** Using an interactive digital platform to record learning milestones, share "WOW moments," and facilitate two-way dialogue.
- **Curriculum Workshops & Consultation:** Inviting parents to curriculum events (e.g., phonics, reading, maths) and hosting two formal parent-teacher consultations per year alongside comprehensive end-of-year reporting.

Staffing & Ratios

We maintain high-quality practitioner-to-child ratios to ensure safety, emotional security, and excellent interaction:

- **Nursery:** 1 Class Teacher, 1 Nursery Nurse, and supporting Early Years practitioners/apprentices (where needed)
- **Reception:** 2 Classes staffed by qualified Class Teachers, Higher Level Teaching Assistants/Teaching Assistants, and Early Years practitioners.
- **Targeted Support:** Specifically appointed staff to assist children with complex additional needs or 1:1 funding.

All staff are trained to interact positively, actively listen to children, and uphold the highest standards of professional conduct.

Enabling Environments

At Sandal Primary School, we have adopted natural and exploratory environments in our early years. We provide an open-ended, natural, and calming aesthetic that replaces bright, over-stimulating plastics with authentic resources, loose parts, and items of awe and wonder. This framework puts the child at the centre, creating mindful spaces that foster deep thinking, problem-solving, and independence.

Children have daily access to indoor and outdoor spaces through planned continuous provision. Environments are enhanced regularly to meet specific learning objectives, capture immediate child interests, and ensure progressive physical and intellectual challenge. From the Spring term in Reception, children engage with structured "weekly challenges" to scaffold their independent learning and self-regulation.

Learning and Development

We deliver an ambitious curriculum that balances child-initiated play with sensitive, adult-led instruction. The seven areas of learning shape our provision; all are interconnected and cannot be taught in isolation.

The Prime Areas (Crucial for building capacity to learn and form relationships):

1. **Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)**
2. **Communication and Language (CL)**
3. **Physical Development (PD)**

Note: The Prime Areas are the central focus within our Nursery provision, serving as the essential building blocks for further learning.

The Specific Areas (Through which the prime areas are strengthened and applied):

4. **Literacy (L)**
5. **Mathematics (M)**
6. **Understanding the World (UW)**
7. **Expressive Arts and Design (EAD)**

Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning

We observe and track how children learn to inform our pedagogy, focusing on three key characteristics:

- **Playing and Exploring:** Children investigate, experience things, and "have a go."
- **Active Learning:** Children concentrate, persist through difficulties, and enjoy achievements.
- **Creating and Thinking Critically:** Children develop their own ideas, make links between concepts, and develop personal strategies.

Curriculum Planning, Observation, and Assessment

- **Planning:** Practitioners use *Development Matters* alongside the statutory framework to design sequence-driven weekly plans. Medium-term planning is topic-led (serving as an engaging "hook") but remains highly flexible to respond to cohort data year on year.
- **Observations:** Assessment is driven by high-quality, incidental observations. Practitioners focus on capturing genuine moments of *new* learning, ensuring that tracking processes do not take staff away from valuable interaction time with children.
- **Statutory Assessments:**

    - **Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA):** Completed within the first six weeks of a child starting Reception.
    - **EYFS Profile (EYFSP):** Completed in the final term of the Reception year. Children are assessed against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELGs) as either **Emerging** or **Expected**.

- **Tracking:** Children's progress is formally updated three times a year on the school tracking system to identify children who are "on track" or "not on track" in each area of learning, for the term, enabling immediate intervention.

Safeguarding, Welfare, and Safety

The physical and psychological well-being of every child is our paramount priority. We strictly comply with the safeguarding and welfare requirements set out in the current *Statutory Framework for the EYFS* and work in complete alignment with *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*.

Child Protection and Safer Culture

- Our EYFS staff undergo regular, robust safeguarding training to recognise signs of abuse, neglect, radicalisation, or domestic distress.
- All staff are fully aware of the school's *Whistleblowing Policy* and procedures for reporting allegations or low-level concerns regarding the conduct of any adult within the setting.
- We actively encourage children to understand boundaries, limits, and rules. We cultivate a culture where children are empowered to use their voices, understand their rights, and know they will be listened to and believed in any circumstance.
- **Mobile Phones and Devices:** To safeguard children, staff, visitors, and volunteers are prohibited from using personal mobile phones or cameras within the EYFS learning environments. Only school-approved, encrypted devices may be used to take photographs or record videos for Tapestry and assessment purposes.

Safer Recruitment and Suitability Checks

Sandal Primary School operates robust safer recruitment procedures to ensure that all adults working with children are suitable to do so. Before any appointment within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) team, the School Business Manager will directly obtain and verify professional references from senior officials (such as a current Headteacher or regulated training provider). In line with statutory guidance, "open references" (including "To Whom It May Concern" letters or character references from family members) are strictly prohibited and will not be accepted.

Whistleblowing

We are committed to fostering an open, transparent culture where the safety and well-being of children are paramount. Clear, robust whistleblowing procedures are made accessible to all EYFS staff, students, and volunteers.

- **Induction:** The whistleblowing procedure is explicitly detailed and discussed during initial safeguarding inductions with the Headteacher.
- **Empowerment:** All practitioners are empowered and contractually expected to immediately report any unsafe practice, poor care standards, or procedural oversights (such as minor breaches in safer eating protocols or supervision limits) to the Senior Leadership Team, with the absolute assurance of protection from reprisal.

Safeguarding Governance, Training, and Staff Support

Safeguarding capacity is actively maintained and monitored through a training and supervision matrix:

- **DSL Capacity:** Sandal Primary School maintains a resilient safeguarding infrastructure with five fully qualified Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs). All DSLs refresh their statutory training every two years.
- **Continuous Staff Training:** In addition to mandatory whole-school annual safeguarding training, the DSL team provides continuous support to all staff, including EYFS practitioners. This is delivered through regular email briefings, a "weekly safeguarding question" to maintain vigilance, and dedicated scenario-based training sessions at least once per academic year.
- **EYFS Supervision:** To support staff well-being and ensure robust care standards, the EYFS Leader conducts formal safeguarding supervision meetings with early years practitioners on a termly basis. These supervisory check-ins provide a confidential space to discuss vulnerable children, manage workload, and review practice. All supervision sessions are securely recorded and archived for reference.

Safer Eating, Nutrition, and Food Safety

We are fully committed to ensuring that meal and snack times are safe, healthy, and supportive social experiences. In accordance with the Early Years Framework, we implement strict safer eating protocols to eliminate choking hazards and manage dietary risks:

- **Active Supervision:** Children are actively supervised at all times while eating or drinking. At least one paediatric first aider will remain in the lunch hall, supervising the Reception children, until the last child has finished. Staff are strategically positioned to monitor the children, ensuring they remain seated and calm to mitigate the risk of choking. Staff are trained to recognise the signs of quiet choking and respond immediately. All Early Years staff are paediatric first aid trained, and any new members of staff working within the Early Years will also be asked to complete this training within the first term of their employment at Sandal Primary.
- **Choking Hazard Preparation:** All food provided by the school—including fruit, vegetables, and tasting items—is prepared strictly in accordance with age-appropriate safety guidelines. High-risk foods are modified before serving (for example, large soft fruits are chopped, and small round foods, such as grapes and cherry tomatoes, are always cut lengthways into quarters).
- **Allergen and Dietary Management:** We maintain rigorous systems to identify and protect children with food allergies, intolerances, or specific religious/cultural dietary requirements. Up-to-date dietary profiles are highly visible to staff during food preparation and service, and robust cross-contamination preventative measures are enforced.

Health and Hygiene

- **Good Health:** Children are provided with a healthy daily snack and fresh milk/water. Handwashing routines are embedded systematically throughout the day (before eating, after toileting, and following outdoor play) to manage infection control.
- **Oral Health:** Oral hygiene is actively promoted through targeted curriculum teaching, carefully planned throughout each academic year, and external professionals are contacted to plan a talk/ visit on dental hygiene for every Reception cohort.
- **Illness and Accidents:** We follow rigorous protocols for managing illness, administering medicine (with written parental consent), and recording accidents.

Intimate Care

We recognise that children arrive at our setting at different stages of physical development. Intimate care (such as toilet training, changing after accidents, or medical adjustments) is carried out with the utmost dignity, privacy, and respect.

- Every child has the right to a professional, sensitive approach from staff.

- Where a child requires an elevated or regular level of intimate care, the school collaborates with parents, the SENDCo, and the school nurse to establish a personalised **Intimate Care Plan** during the first few weeks of the child attending Sandal Primary.
- When intimate care is carried out by a member of staff, it is away from other children, staff and visitors to ensure we maintain a child's privacy. However, practitioners must remain observable or work within a clear line of sight of at least one other member of staff to ensure transparency and protection for themselves.
- All intimate care procedures are recorded internally to maintain transparency and protect both the child and practitioners.

Attendance and Absences

The Early Years framework now explicitly mandates that settings monitor child absences tightly to catch early signs of abuse, neglect, or county lines exploitation.

At Sandal Primary, we ensure that we hold at least two emergency contacts for every child on our roll. If a child is absent without prior notification, our Attendance and Safeguarding Officer will contact parents/ carers promptly on the first day of the child's absence. If a parent cannot be reached, we will attempt to contact the alternative emergency contacts and actively evaluate patterns of absence for safeguarding trends.

Transitions

We design transitions carefully to protect children's emotional security and ensure a smooth adjustment to new milestones.

[Nursery Entry] ---> Home/setting visits & 2 stay-and-play sessions

[Reception Entry] --> Home/ setting visits, 2 stay and play sessions, 2 whole-class mornings, phased September cohorts (new to Sandal children 1st day, everyone 2nd day) and Year 5 and Buddy System

[Year 1 Transition] --> 2 whole-class mornings and shared Pedagogy

- **Into Nursery:** Includes a summer induction meeting, open morning visits, and dedicated home visits by nursery staff in September before a phased, gentle entry.
- **Into Reception:** Includes a spring induction meeting, setting visits by the Early Years Leader to existing pre-schools, summer transition mornings, and home visits conducted by the class teacher and family support worker. Reception children are assigned a **Year 5 Buddy** to support social integration during lunchtimes and whole-school events.

- **Into Year 1:** To ensure continuity, Reception teachers spend structured time teaching within the Year 1 classrooms during the summer term. This familiarises children with the upcoming physical environment and shifting pedagogical styles. Extra transition sessions are customised for any child showing signs of vulnerability or anxiety.

Links with Other Policies

This policy operates alongside and should be read in conjunction with:

- *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*
- *Inclusion and SEND Policy*
- *Behavior Regulation Policy*
- *Health and Safety Policy / First Aid and Medical Policy*
- *Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy (including Mobile Phone Use)*

Monitoring and Review

It is the responsibility of all EYFS practitioners to implement the principles and safety standards detailed in this policy. The EYFS Leader and Headteacher monitor the setting regularly via learning walks, data analysis, and environment audits. This policy is reviewed annually by the EYFS Leader and approved by the Curriculum Committee of the Governing Body to incorporate updated statutory guidance.

Date policy written: June 2026

Date approved by the School Standards Committee:

Date to be reviewed: June 2029