



## EARLY YEARS POLICY

**Policy reviewed: April 2021**

**Next review: April 2022**

**This document will remain valid until the end of the academic year 2021-22**

### Background information:

Palmers Green High School was established in 1905. It is an independent day school for around 300 pupils aged 3 to 16. The school motto, 'By Love, Serve One Another', was carefully chosen by the Founder, Miss Alice Hum, and it still epitomises a special ethos where throughout the School each individual is nurtured, successes are celebrated and contribution to the community is greatly valued. The School is made up of 4 departments: the Nursery is the School's Pre-Prep Department; the Prep Department (Reception, Year 1 and 2); the Junior Department (Year 3 to 6) and the Senior Department (Year 7 to 11).

At Palmers Green High School, in the Early Years we follow the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2021. Ultimately, we work towards the 17 Early Learning Goals and each child's Profile is completed by the end of the Reception year before they move into Key Stage 1. Pupils are encouraged to learn through play. It is recognised that we are developing the 'whole' child: we aim to meet each individual's learning needs, with regard to the importance of developing their language skills and extending their vocabulary, as well as nurturing their personal, social and emotional development. We aim to encourage a positive attitude to learning and we offer a broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to the children's age and stage of development. We recognise that 'All children learn more in the period from birth to five years old than any other time in their lives' and that 'children in the early years are becoming powerful learners and thinkers' ('Development Matters' 2020). Staff in the Foundation Stage at Palmers Green High School work closely together to ensure continuity and progression for each child.

### Structure of the EYFS

The Nursery and the Reception Class make up the EYFS at Palmers Green High School. The Nursery is based at 85 Wellington Road, Bush Hill Park EN1 2PL, while the Reception Class is based at the main school site at 104 Hoppers Road, London N21 3LJ.

## Organisation of the EYFS

Pupils join the Nursery when they are three years old. They generally attend for between 3 to 5 terms before the majority of them transfer into the Reception Class. The Nursery has a maximum of 24 pupils and there are three members of staff (a teacher and two teaching assistants: one full-time and one part-time). Pupils can be full-time (8:45 until 3:45) every week day; part-time 8:45 until 12:45, including lunch, every day, or a mixture of every morning and some afternoons. We recommend that part-time pupils do stay for some afternoons a week the term before they go into Reception to ease their transition to full time.

Pupils attend the Reception Class full time in the academic year they turn 5. The Reception Class has a maximum of 24 pupils and is staffed with a teacher and a teaching assistant. The school day begins at 8:30 and finishes at 3.00. There are two breaks: a short morning break and a longer break after lunch has been eaten.

Nursery pupils bring a packed lunch to eat, which is nut and seed free, and has suitably healthy foods that the children enjoy. They consume their lunches in the Nursery classroom. Reception Class pupils can bring their own packed lunch or have hot or cold food from the School caterers and eat in the dining room with Year 1 and 2 pupils. Reception Class pupils also bring a fruit or vegetable snack to eat at first break, while at Nursery the pupils bring in one or two healthy snacks a day, depending on whether they are part-time or full-time. These are eaten sitting down at tables and each pupil brings a drink of water daily to have when they are thirsty.

In the Reception Class, the pupils have specialist teachers for Drama, Music and PE (Games, Gymnastics and Dance). They also visit the school library once a week where they choose a book under the guidance of a trained librarian.

Staffing arrangements for Early Years children is organised in accordance with the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' (March 2021), to provide for the needs of all the children and ensure their safety. Both the Nursery and Reception classes are led by qualified teachers, who work closely with the Teaching Assistants, who are all Level 3 or NNEB qualified. On trips out of school, a ratio of one adult to two Nursery children will be upheld, while groups of 4 Reception children will be accompanied by an adult or if on a local walk there will be one adult to every two children.

Making sure the pupils are kept safe at all times is of utmost importance in the Foundation Stage at Palmers Green High School. We aim to create a safe and secure environment and encourage our pupils to play safely. We follow the EYFS Statutory Framework (2021) and Keeping Children Safe In Education. We also follow set

procedures when children become ill or have an accident. Any visitors who come to talk to the classes (for example parents speaking about how they celebrate Chinese New Year) are closely vetted beforehand and a log of visitors is kept.

### Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum Overview

At the Nursery and in the Reception Class at Palmers Green High School, we follow the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (2021) and at PGHS also have regard to 'Development Matters' (2020), which is non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage. The framework is mandatory for all early years' providers. It includes four guiding principles and seven areas of learning and development, the areas of learning are connected and 'the characteristics of effective teaching and learning weave through them all' (Development Matters 2020). The School believes that young children learn best through first hand experiences and play, as well as adult-led activities. Our knowledge of the pupils is based on on-going observations and assessments, as well as valued parental input.

There are four guiding principles of the EYFS:

#### **A Unique Child:**

At the Nursery and in the Reception Class of Palmers Green High School we believe that each child is an individual who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

#### **Positive Relationships:**

These allow children to learn to be strong and independent. Such relationships should be warm and foster a sense of belonging; take on board the child's needs, feelings and interests; be supportive of a child's efforts and independence; set clear boundaries; be stimulating and built on key person relationships. At Nursery, each adult is a keyworker to a group of pupils and in the Reception Class, the teacher is the keyworker.

#### **Enabling Environments:**

We believe that strong partnerships between early year's practitioners and parents/ carers help create a situation where there is an enabling environment and children can learn and develop well. All people and learning are valued. Stimulating resources, rich learning opportunities through play, adult support and teaching give children the confidence to take risks and explore the learning environments both inside and out.

#### **Development and Learning:**

In our Early Years department, we believe that children develop and learn at different rates. We are committed to supporting each individual, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, to learn and develop across the seven areas of learning. Children are taught with challenging activities involving play across the prime

and specific areas of learning and development which foster the characteristics of effective learning.

### **There are seven key features of effective practice (Development Matters 2020):**

#### **The best for every child**

At the Nursery and Reception Class at PGHS we believe that all pupils deserve an equal chance of success and a high-quality early education. We aim to identify any special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) quickly and provide any extra help required promptly so good progress can be made.

#### **High-quality care**

It is acknowledged that the child's experience is central to what we do as early years practitioners and that we need to provide high-quality care so that our pupils thrive. We understand pupils find starting a new Nursery or Reception Class in school a 'big step' and plan for the transition.

#### **The curriculum: what we want children to learn**

At PGHS, we want our Early Years curriculum to be ambitious; we plan flexibly, driven by the interests of our pupils and understand that depth in early learning is 'More important than covering lots of things in a superficial way' (Development Matters' 2020).

#### **Pedagogy: helping children to learn**

Pupils of this age are powerful learners and they can all make progress in their learning with the correct help. We know that effective pedagogy involves a mix of different approaches and that enabling environments, indoors and outside, create high-quality play opportunities. Children also learn through guided work with adults and need more guided learning as they get older.

#### **Assessment: checking what children have learnt**

In the Nursery and Reception Class at PGHS, we notice through observation what pupils can do and what they know. We use this knowledge to identify what we want the pupils to know and be able to do next.

#### **Self-regulation and executive function**

It is understood that executive function includes the child's ability to hold information in mind; focus their attention; regulate their behaviour and plan what to do next. These abilities contribute to a child's growing ability to self-regulate, so they can focus their thinking; monitor what they are doing and adapt; regulate strong feelings; be patient for what they want and bounce back when things get difficult. We note that language development is crucial for self-regulation.

## **Partnership with parents**

At Nursery and Reception Class at PGHS, we strive to have strong and respectful partnerships with parents to help their children thrive. We aim to give clear information about their child's progress and understand that parents' help at home makes an important impact on their child's learning. We encourage parents to chat, play and read with their children to help develop their communication and language skills.

### The Seven Areas of Learning and Development:

The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is made up of seven areas of learning, which are all important and underpin all future learning.

The areas of learning have been divided into two groups: Prime Areas and Specific Areas. Children should mainly develop the Prime Areas of learning first as they 'underpin everything in the early years' Development Matters 2021. The Specific Areas 'help children to strengthen and apply the prime areas'

#### The Prime Areas:

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development

#### The Specific Areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

## **Educational Programmes**

### Communication and Language:

This area of the curriculum underpins all seven areas of learning and development. It is important that pupils have back-and-forth interactions from an early age; that the classroom is a language rich environment and vocabulary and language structures are developed through conversations with peers and adults; storytelling and role play activities and being read to frequently.

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development:

PSED is crucial for children to live healthy and happy lives at school and in later life, as well as being fundamental to their cognitive development. Supportive relationships with adults enable children to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. Children need to be supported to manage their emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set simple goals for themselves, have confidence in their abilities to do things, persist and wait for what they want. Adults help them to learn how to look after their bodies, including eating healthily, being aware of their dental health and independently manage

their personal needs. They will learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and peacefully resolve conflicts.

#### Physical Development:

Physical activity is important to children's general development so they can pursue 'happy, healthy and active lives' (Development Matters 2021). This area is divided into gross motor skills and fine motor skills and is concerned with developing a child's core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for the development of healthy bodies, as well as social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control aids hand-eye co-ordination, linked to early literacy. The aim is to enable children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

#### Literacy:

The development of a life-long love of reading is considered crucial for children. Reading comprises two parts: language comprehension (necessary for reading and writing) and word reading. To develop language comprehension a child needs conversations with adults, books read to them and to learn the enjoyment of rhymes, poems and songs. Word reading involves decoding words and recognising unfamiliar words. Writing encompasses spelling and handwriting, as well as thinking of ideas of what to write, turning that into speech and then writing the words.

#### Mathematics:

In order to excel mathematically, children need to have a strong grounding in number: being able to count confidently, develop a deep understanding of the numbers to 10, learning about the relationships between numbers and the patterns within numbers. Children will have frequent and varied opportunities to build and apply their understanding to create a secure base of knowledge and vocabulary. Children should also develop positive attitudes and interests in mathematics and be prepared to 'have a go' and not be afraid to make mistakes.

#### Understanding the World:

This area guides children to make sense of their physical world and their community. Children need to have a frequent range of personal experiences, such as visiting parks and museums, also meeting important people in society like firefighters or police officers in order to increase their knowledge and sense of the world they live in. Their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world is also fostered through reading a wide variety of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, which also serves to extend children's vocabularies, which will later support reading comprehension.

#### Expressive Arts and Design:

Children's imagination and creativity is supported by the development of children's artistic and cultural awareness. At PGHS we recognise it is important that children have regular opportunities to engage with the arts, offering them opportunities to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials. In order to develop a child's

understanding, self-expression, vocabulary and ability to communicate through the arts, they need to see, hear and participate in a variety and quality of experiences.

At Palmers Green High School, we aspire that our pupils will reach an 'expected' standard in all the EYFS Early Learning Goals at the end of the Reception Class and that they will be prepared for achieving well in Key Stage 1.

#### The Characteristics of Effective Learning:

The Characteristics of Effective Learning represent how a child engages with other people and their environment. They epitomise the strategies that a child adopts in order to access their learning and comprises the following:

- playing and exploring
- active learning
- creating and thinking critically

They underpin learning and development across all areas and aim to support the child to stay an effective and motivated learner.

**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

#### Curriculum Planning

The Early Years Staff plan activities weekly based on the pupils' interests and needs, also with reference to our observations of them and with regard to the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' (2021) and non-statutory 'Development Matters' document (2020). We teach through activities based on topics. Popular topics include 'People who help us', 'All about me', 'Festivals and Celebrations' and 'Animals' and will incorporate the 7 areas of learning and development and related educational programmes, being also mindful of the 4 overarching principles and 7 key features of effective practice.

The Nursery and Reception Class pupils might also prepare foods as part of their curriculum. For example, they might make sandwiches or porridge; bake biscuits or cakes; maybe create healthy fruit salads or soups. These foods might be eaten in the classroom or taken home to show parents. Staff are aware of any allergies a pupil may have and will review ingredients carefully as part of their planning.

In the Nursery and Reception Class at Palmers Green High School, we use a variety of approaches to learning to read, including the 'Letter and Sounds' synthetic phonics

scheme and the 'Jolly Phonics' scheme actions. Home learning tasks may be sent home for Nursery pupils and weekly homework is sent home in the Reception Class. As soon as a pupil has shown the ability to read, they are given a reading book to take home to practise their reading at home. We encourage parents to read their children books at home and talk to them about the text and the illustrations.

### Assessment for Learning

Assessment is on an ongoing basis to help parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. When any pupil joins the Nursery or Reception Class, a baseline assessment and observations are undertaken in order to establish their next steps for learning. During adult-directed activities, Staff monitor the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. The learning and development of each child takes place through regular formal and informal observations. At the Nursery, Learning Journals are kept for each child as evidence of their learning or experiences and sent home at the end of each academic year. These might include photographs, pictures or writing and the child's own comments about their learning are included. There are regular opportunities for parents to see these journals and add their 'voice' to the contents. In the Reception Class, the teacher and TA use 'Tapestry', an on-line Learning Journal, to collect observations for each child to monitor their progress, which are recorded on a tablet. The observations comprise digital photographs or videos and text. The observations are made available regularly for each parent to see their child's learning and parents are invited to participate in the process by making a comment or adding their own photographs of their child. New observations are downloaded for parents to access every couple of weeks. Parents can download a paper copy, if they wish. The teacher can also print out a paper copy for the parents if they cannot do so themselves.

Ongoing assessment, or 'formative assessment', is an integral part of the learning and development process, involving the Nursery or Reception Class staff knowing the children's level of achievements and interest and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child based on that knowledge. Staff draw on their knowledge of the child and professional judgement to decide if a child is at the expected level of development or not. Any learning and development needs will be addressed with parents and/or carers, as well as the PGHS Head of Learning Support or any relevant professionals, if required.

### Parents as Partners

At Palmers Green High School, we aim to create and maintain good relationships with parents and/or carers, as we realise the importance of this partnership to each child's learning. Parents or carers are also welcome to be adult helpers on trips, attend School events and be involved in their child's learning and development.

Parents also have opportunities to attend Parents' Evenings to talk to Early Years Staff about their daughter's progress and to discuss any learning and development needs. If a parent has a concern at any time, they are invited to make an appointment at a mutually



convenient time to discuss their concern with Staff. At the end of the Foundation Stage (towards the end of the Summer Term), the EYFS Profile is completed and each child has a description of 'emerging' or 'expected' placed against 17 Early Learning Goals. This information is shared with parents and the Year 1 teacher. A written report is sent home from the Nursery and the Reception Class at the end of the summer term.

Sometimes children can experience on-going difficulties. The Early Years Staff will consult with parents and also the PGHS Head of Learning Support to identify if additional support is required or if advice needs to be sought from an external agency or service.

### Transitions

Transitions from the Nursery to the Reception Class and Reception Class to Year 1 are carefully planned for. Pupils new to the Nursery are invited to a 'stay and play' session at the Nursery with their parents before the September starting date and have a home visit or a meeting at the Nursery at the beginning of the Autumn Term. In the Summer Term, the Reception teacher comes to the Nursery to get to know the pupils who will be transferring to the main school and they are invited to see their new classroom with their parents. At the end of the Foundation Stage, the Reception pupils spend some time with the Year 1 teacher in their new classroom. There are meetings between the Nursery and Reception staff, as well as Reception and Year 1 staff to discuss end of year assessments and to ensure a smooth transition.