



Curriculum Policy

Our context driven approach

As two very small schools (with 2 children and around 30 – 40 children respectively) we have mixed age classes. To ensure the best possible curriculum for the children in our schools, we have adapted a creative and flexible approach to our planning. The children from Holy Island travel to Lowick when the tides allow and stay and work at the school on Holy Island when the causeway is closed. The curriculum planning runs across both schools for continuity of their education and experiences. The Holy Island teacher works across both schools to support this process. The children from Lowick also visit Holy Island school regularly as part of this shared experience.

We are aware of our position in a rural, coastal and sometimes isolated part of the country where our children are predominantly (although not exclusively) of white British heritage. Opportunities to travel more widely, which were already fairly limited, have become more so since the Covid pandemic and subsequent restrictions and lockdowns. Our curriculum offer therefore needs to allow our children opportunities to think about and experience the wider world through creative planning and content, trips and visits. This includes awareness and respect for diversity on all counts. As a church schools we are aware of the importance of embedding our values through everything we do in school including through planning our curriculum.

Due to the very small size of our classes, we usually teach with year group objectives for English and maths and by phase or key stage for other subjects (EYFS, KS1 and Lower KS2). We carefully check the curriculum offer at upper Key stage 2 at our feeder middle school to ensure full and broad coverage of all the requirements of the national curriculum as a minimum. Reference to middle school curriculum objectives and themes for years 5 and 6 inform our planning to ensure the children are well prepared for their next stage of education when they leave our school at the end of year 4.

For these reasons, our long term planning is done on a rolling basis. For each term (or half term) we have different whole school themes planned for the next five years – although there is flexibility as required. This theme is centred largely around our history and geography curriculum although it is also cross curricular and linked to current events. This is carefully cross-referenced with the national curriculum to ensure full coverage and multiple opportunities to return to, make connections with or develop from prior learning to promote long term retention of knowledge and skills.

For other subjects the themes are by key stage and so follow a two year rolling programme so that over the two years of the key stage (KS1 and lower KS2) the children experience breadth and depth appropriate for their age and stage of learning. We seek natural connections between subjects and capitalise on them, where possible, to help the children to weave a broader and deeper understanding over time. We also recognise where subjects or objectives may need to standalone and avoid 'shoehorning' weak links into our planning where they do not fit or would not benefit the children's learning at that time.

To supplement our curriculum, we plan theme days or sessions. For example, we have a STEM day planned for each term focused on different areas of science and technology. We use special days such as religious festivals or charity awareness days throughout the year to help the children create long term memories from these experiences linked to our overall curriculum work.

We work with partners to enhance our offer. Through the Newcastle United Foundation, we access Commando Joe's work on character education and adventurous activities – supplementing PE and PSHE/RSE and helping the development of the whole child. We also access sports coaches to supplement our work and to enable us to take part in sports festivals and shared competitions with other schools. An active learning expert helps deliver extra English and maths one day a week for all children and supports our school aim of keeping the children healthy and active.

We are aware of our own locality and seek to draw from this as part of creating a sense of belonging in our community. Planning will incorporate our natural area and local cultural events and places as well as looking outwards at the wider world. A number of staff are trained in forest school and beach school approaches which help us make the most of the outdoor areas and the environment where we live.

We want our curriculum to be relevant, engaging, exciting, creative and challenging for our children. We want to inspire our children to be curious and love learning. We craft our long term plans to allow for spiralled learning which encourages long term retention of knowledge and skills. We seek to make connections and give the children time for reflection and discussion of what we are learning.

To supplement our curriculum, we offer a range of extra-curricular activities in the form of free after school clubs. These cover different areas of interest and have included different sports such as rugby, cricket, athletics and outdoor games as well as gardening, eco-schools, art and cooking. We usually run four after school clubs a week.

English

We recognise listening and reading to be the foundation of learning across the curriculum. We promote a love of reading through our morning 'reading for pleasure' small groups. We help our children to become confident and fluent readers through using the synthetic phonics programme Read Write Inc. in very small groups. This is deepened through guided reading sessions on a weekly basis for all children where children are supported as they read, talk and think their way through a text.

We draw on techniques from Talk for Writing and resources and inspiration from *CLPE's Power of Reading to plan and deliver effective and engaging English lessons. Reading and writing is also supported across the curriculum. Despite mixed age classes, the children are taught to year group expectations in English with challenge to enable children to work at age related expectations and where possible at greater depth. We ensure the children write within a variety of genres which we return to and build on over the year.

Book choices in our English lessons and during shared reading support our vision to enable the children to access stories from different perspectives including different cultures, faiths, races, family types, orientations and celebrating neuro-divergent characters.

Handwriting is taught across the school and older children are encouraged to join their writing through regular discrete handwriting lessons.

Spelling is taught across Key Stages 1 and 2 in weekly sessions linked to year group spelling rules. This is shared with parents through weekly homework and is reviewed at the end of the week with short tasks to check understanding and retention.

Due to lockdown, the children have had an interrupted education. We have used Classroom Secrets Kids and activities made on Seesaw to support English learning at home during these periods. The staff recorded daily stories (short ones and also chapter by chapter for longer books) for all the children to encourage a love of stories and books. The school delivered books from our library to families who were running short on reading material.

English planning has been adapted to meet the challenges on return to school. In particular, to remind children of spellings, grammar and punctuation they had forgotten and to encourage children to begin to write at length again (building resilience). Special theme days such as a visit from a dragon (through Teach Rex) inspired the children in their creative and newspaper writing. Links to Christian Aid campaigns where the children wrote letters to our MP were successful in addressing these challenges. We will continue to find these opportunities to add inspiration and deeper meaning to our work in English.

* the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.

Maths

The schools work closely with our local maths hub: The Great North Maths Hub and have taken part in research groups linked to the hub for a number of years. The schools were featured in an article in NCETM's Primary Maths on beginning their mastery journey and continue to work in teacher Research Groups on sustaining mastery. The school is also currently taking part in the Mastering Number intervention programme for Reception and KS1. We have previously taken part in Early Years mastery which has informed our nursery and reception practice and planning.

The schools make use of the White Rose scheme of work as well as the NCETM materials on recovery and progress, although through joint planning with other small local schools this is adapted and sometimes reordered to fit our needs. This is an ongoing process with half termly / termly meetings between the schools for the purpose of planning and reviewing.

The schools are well resourced with practical equipment as well as Power Maths materials. There is an emphasis on using practical equipment alongside pictorial and abstract representations to enable the children to make connections. Reasoning and problem solving is an integral part of our practice, running alongside skills and knowledge being taught. Evidence has taught us that children who experience some struggle in their learning (but not too much) are more like to retain what they have learnt in their longer term memories. Our aim is to provide the right amount of challenge for each child to enable this process and promote long term memory and mastery of the concepts being taught.

Maths is supported across the curriculum where appropriate, particularly in computing (when graphing for example), science, history and geography.

During lockdown maths learning at home was supported through interactive lessons and games from Classroom Secrets Kids as well as activities made on Seesaw. The curriculum was rearranged on feedback from parents to enable home learning to focus on areas of the maths curriculum parents felt more comfortable with supporting including the four operations, measure and telling the time. On return to school we needed to work more carefully through the curriculum to recover lost learning on key areas and prioritised building blocks of mathematical understanding such as place value to enable the children to have a firm foundation going forward.

RE

As church schools, RE is an important subject in our curriculum. Through the agreement of our Local County Council and the diocese we follow the Newcastle and Durham diocesan curriculum (as one school is VC and the other is VA). Two thirds of our curriculum is about Christianity and we use the Understanding Christianity resource to aid our planning. We ask big questions for each unit to encourage an enquiry based approach. One third of our curriculum is given to studying major world faiths: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. We strive to teach the children that these religions are living and global faiths. We encourage the children to learn about the text, make connections and consider the impact.

We vary our planning so that the world religions are given individual attention as well as linked thematic units such as Pilgrimage or Belonging which cover several different religions' beliefs and practices. Other world faiths are included as when it would be appropriate for example, a visitor from Japan talked to the children about Shinto shrines.

Through our partnerships with our local churches we are given a focus for some of our work in RE in the form of presentations for the churches of Lowick and Holy Island. We have also made connections to our history curriculum in considering the rise of Christianity in the local area, the Northern Saints and the Viking Raid on the priory of Lindisfarne. We are also planning our work around the Lindisfarne Gospels returning to the North East shortly.

Early Years

We welcome children into our nursery from the age of two. Appropriate activities are planned for the range of ages in our nursery (between two to four years old) and where links can be made to the main school these are included with a light touch. Mainly the work is child led and is altered to suit the needs of the individual children in our care. The nursery has developed values led planning with progression points incorporated to allow them a clear understanding of the children's progress and readiness for their next steps.

Reception children join class 1 full time in September unless specific alterations are required to meet needs of individual children. They follow the new Early Years framework and keep to the whole school themes where appropriate for their learning. We use core books in Early Years to ensure all children are familiar with a growing number of stories. Careful consideration is given to the needs of the children within the context of the framework and learning opportunities are planned accordingly. For example, when the KS1 children will be creating moving pictures in Design Technology using levers or wheels, Reception children will be undertaking construction projects suited to their current knowledge and skills. This is planned around the specific children in this group and their particular needs to facilitate progress. We recognise that this varies from cohort to cohort and throughout the year so flexibility is a key part of our Early Years offer. As a small school we are able to be very responsive.

Where possible, nursery children are invited to the main school visits or special events to enable them to benefit from a wider range of activities, locations and experiences. Nursery children also join the main school for snack time and lunchtime to help them be part of one school community and to learn from their older peers.

We make use of the county created child tracker and readiness for Reception tools to help us keep a close eye on the children's progress and ensure they are ready for the next stage of their education.

SEND

We commit to Quality First Teaching to enable our SEND children to take part and benefit from lessons alongside their peers. Sometimes it becomes necessary to adapt our curriculum to meet the needs of a child with SEND. This will mostly be as part of our usual timetable but may sometimes include facilitating extra interventions on small group or on a one to one basis. Where this is required, we ensure the child does not miss out on receiving an equally broad and creative curriculum offer as their peers.