

## ELEANOR PALMER PRIMARY SCHOOL

### A POLICY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

As a primary school, our core purpose is to ensure our pupils attain the highest standards in all aspects of literacy and maths, leaving this school with both excellent levels of attainment and having progressed well from their starting points. We believe that we will be more successful if this core goal is based upon a clear and shared ethos and approach to teaching and learning.

As a school, we share these aims:

- To ensure that we inspire in all pupils a love of learning and the desire to continue to learn.
- To equip all pupils with the tools and self-confidence necessary to constructively influence their own lives.
- To ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to take part in the life and work of the school.
- To be a place every child remembers with affection.

The following describes how we work together as a school in pursuit of these aims; these are our principles of teaching and learning.

#### **Put creativity at the heart of teaching and learning**

We believe that children who think creatively and independently are more likely to discover things for themselves, to be open to new ideas and to be motivated to work beyond lesson time, pursuing their interests. Allowing children to think and work creatively develops self-confidence and builds key learning skills e.g. managing their own behaviour, understanding the learning process, developing their preferred learning style, thinking systematically, and collaborating with others.

We believe these key skills and attitudes are best developed within a motivating cross-curricular thematic approach. Our aim is to develop a rich and varied curriculum, which meets national requirements and is also unique to our school.

Teachers are encouraged to think creatively when planning a term's work in all subjects - to make connections between subjects, to take risks, and to be innovative.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Each class has an over-arching termly topic (half-termly in EYFS) which drives and inspires their learning... and the whole school knows about it!
- There is no requirement to stick within the structures of any particular schemes of work. Working from the National Curriculum, teachers are free to create the context for learning that they feel most inspires them and will inspire the children, whilst covering all statutory requirements.
- Teachers make authentic and creative links between subjects.
- We have a specific fund to support work with arts groups and artists.
- Teachers' personal enthusiasms and passions are positively encouraged and backed.
- Teachers share expertise and collaborate to develop and hone their topics.
- Children's interests, independence of thought and responses are valued, helping to shape learning.
- We have special events throughout the year - some traditions and some new - which encourage innovative thinking e.g. the Egg Race.

### **Make learning vivid and real**

Our teachers work hard to plan interesting and engaging work that stimulates imaginations. We maximise first hand and practical experiences, carefully selecting resources such as objects, artefacts, people, and places. Depth is more important than breadth and work is blocked in subjects such as design technology and art to allow for maximum engagement and quality rather than superficial curriculum coverage.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- We have a policy of a minimum of 3 trips or visitors per class per term.
- We have a large fund within our delegated budget to subsidise visits and visitors.
- Our PTA is supportive of funding artists working in school.
- We subscribe to the Islington Artefacts Loan Service and each class may order a box a term, including costumes where relevant.
- It is expected that artefacts that support topic work will be displayed centrally in the classroom and used by the teachers and children in lessons.
- Our termly planning matrix allows teachers to plan work in blocks and to design links.
- Children are encouraged to bring in resources to support class work.

Tell me and I will forget  
Show me and I will understand  
Involve me and I will remember  
Confucius

## Include and value everyone

Eleanor Palmer is an inclusive school. The achievements, attitudes and wellbeing of every person in the school matters and we all have a voice, and agency in our learning.

We strive to create a culture of equity and we value diverse thought and experience. As a staff, we are highly reflective about our teaching style, environment, rules and expectations of behaviour to ensure that every child is feeling confident, happy, secure and ready to learn.

Our team goes above and beyond to overcome children's barriers to learning - our mantra is 'whatever it takes'.

One of the many benefits of being a small school is that we know each child really well. Relationships, drawing on expert advice and our professional experience make for excellent SEN provision.

Recognising and celebrating success through assemblies, displays and performances is very important at Eleanor Palmer. We ensure that there is a broad range of opportunities to shine.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Teachers design lessons keeping in mind every child's learning journey. Questions and activities are differentiated to meet the needs of pupils but which give the whole class the opportunity to learn together, working on the same learning point.
- We do not have set groupings. As part of our commitment to a growth mindset philosophy, groupings are flexible. All children should find work 'just right' and no child should experience repeated failure or effortless success.
- We have an experienced team of senior leaders, support teachers and learning support assistants who work closely with class teachers to offer additional support. We think in terms of Team 5 or Team 1!
- We have good relationships with a range of other professionals and value their support and advice in meeting children's needs.
- We hold a Big School Meeting once a fortnight where everyone in the school regroups in a vertically mixed class to debate decisions, raise concerns and discuss things that impact our school community. This is a wonderful way of every child from Reception to Year 6 being heard. .
- When we do a whole school art theme, we ensure every child's painting is displayed. Similarly, there are no selective choirs - when we sing, everyone sings!
- Our unique music scheme means that every child can learn a stringed instrument for 3 years, fully funded by the school.
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- There are regular mentions in our weekly newsletter and at each Friday assembly for a range of different achievements.

## Set high standards - children experience excellence

We have the highest expectations of staff in terms of commitment and professionalism, classroom organisation, display, and fundamentally, their teaching practice..

Equally, we have high expectations of our learners; we expect effort, engagement and ambition in their approach to learning at school and at home. We set great store by subject knowledge and believe that children should be 'taught lots of stuff': topics should be planned to include lots of information and interesting facts.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- We positively encourage teachers to seek out subject specialists to enhance topic work and so that the children have the experience of working alongside experts.
- The vast majority of staff are here before 8am and/or until 6pm.
- Staff meetings begin on time, they last for two hours fortnightly to afford depth of learning, and everyone is there.
- Deadlines must be met - they are set for a reason.
- There is a strong culture of volunteering and taking on 'extra' amongst all the staff.
- Classrooms are expected to be well organised, tidy and beautiful; they are arranged to enable the children to be independent in using resources.
- All art work must be double mounted and all other work at least single mounted.
- Classroom display boards should be covered by half term, with work that reflects the term's theme. Carefully thought out colours should be selected for mounts and backing paper to enhance not detract from children's work.
- We work as a team to cover all communal display boards once a term.
- Children are expected to be at school on time every day.
- We look for, praise and notice effort and progress.
- We recognise and value high achievement and create opportunities for those children who excel, where relevant, to take part in activities beyond the school.
- Each term we welcome experts into school to enhance topic work, for example an explorer, an anthropologist, a basketball coach, a professional folk violinist or an architect. We belong to the Camden Sports Association and take part in several borough competitions e.g. the swimming gala, football, cross country.
- We enter both the United Kingdom Maths Trust Challenge and the Mathematics Association Primary Challenge (and do well!).
- We belong to the LA Library service and so books are always new and relevant to the term's topic. Class teachers maintain this high standard in their book corners - reading children's literature and ensuring we have new titles to try.
- We focus on purpose and audience, strive for authentic outcomes, and give children time to achieve something of quality.

## **The planning process demands thought, creativity and time**

There is a high expectation of the quality and depth of medium term planning and it is not acceptable to simply photocopy and follow pre-written plans, although these may be used as a starting point.

Topics that are unique and original are positively encouraged and being a London school, there are always special events and exhibitions that must be fully utilised. If teachers are motivated and enthusiastic about the term's work, then the children will be too.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Topics are planned for the year, at the start of the year, ensuring that different subjects take priority each term: one history led, one geography led and one science led.
- Our teaching team has designed vertical plans to show how each subject progresses throughout the entire school, from EYFS to Year 6. These are used by teachers to ensure they get the right pitch and challenge, and that they are building upon and referring to prior learning.
- There is no expectation that every subject is taught every week or every term, rather we strike a balance across the year.
- Staff meeting time is set aside each term for sharing ideas and looking for creative links and innovations for the following term.
- Very detailed termly plans are prepared by the second week of each term and are then discussed with the Head and Deputy at an after school meeting.
- Our planning matrix gives an overview of how the term is planned, how subjects link together and which, if any, subjects are to be 'blocked'.
- There is then no requirement to give in weekly plans, or to write weekly plans to a standard format. It is expected however, that each teacher plans their lessons based on their longer term plans, and their assessment of pupil learning. Lesson sequences must take small coherent steps through learning.
- Teachers are expected to actively research and plan ahead for opportunities to use the museums, galleries and outdoor spaces of London.

## **Teaching technique matches learning need**

Teachers working at this school must be strong in the full range of teaching strategies so that they can design their lessons to meet the needs of their pupils as well as the content of the curriculum. Fitness for purpose is at the heart of our planning; a week's lessons should include whole class direct teaching and modelling, small group work, practical tasks, paired work and individual work. There should be a good balance between teacher/pupil talk and well-structured pupil/pupil talk opportunities to develop oracy. We structure and pace teaching and learning so that children understand what is to be learnt, why and how.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Groups are flexible so teachers can respond to different rates of progression and appropriate next steps.
- Pupils have set places relevant to context and need at some times in the day, but there are opportunities at other times for children to choose where to sit and with whom to work.
- Classrooms have defined spaces for whole class teaching, and tables arranged - and rearranged - to suit the shape of different lessons.
- Teachers are expected to be highly reflective about why they have made decisions about classroom layout or lesson design; staff meetings often provide collegiate time for this.
- There are many authentic opportunities for co-operative group work.
- Children learn songs and stories with actions, particularly in EYFS and KS1.
- We make good use of visual resources, representations and manipulatives in our teaching.

### **Asking questions is central to learning**

We place great store by asking questions, participating in 'shared thinking' and discussion in our teaching and in our work as a staff. Interactive, dialogic teaching promotes this style of learning. Teachers' questions need to be well planned and to both prompt ('What was the name of...') and probe ('What if...') the children's thinking. The best extension questions are those aimed just above what the child can already do - Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development".

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- We start each topic finding out what the children already know and what they would like to find out.
- Our Headteacher takes Years 5 and 6 for a weekly problem solving lesson in maths.
- The plenary (coming together!) is seen as a vital part of the lesson, which need not come at the end of a lesson. Plenaries are used to further extend collective thinking and to test possibilities for next steps.
- Children's questions are always responded to and valued.
- We positively encourage and expect inquisitiveness and intellectual curiosity!

### **The assessment priority is assessment for learning**

We aim to include children in their learning as much as possible.

Teachers are constantly assessing, as they ask questions in lessons and lean over shoulders. Being as close as possible to the 'teachable moment' is fundamental to the way we assess and how we plan next steps in learning. We place great store by this style of formative assessment for learning during lessons, as well as summative assessments of learning, where the children are assessed against national standards.

Teachers meet with parents individually to discuss progress, mid Autumn term, mid Spring term, and then at the end of each school year, when teachers write a very full report about each child.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- All work, where possible, is marked alongside the child. If not alongside then before the next lesson.
- The purpose of an activity, and what needs to happen next to improve, are always discussed and explained.
- Teachers make meaningful, purposeful 'RAG' assessments of children's attainment in reading, writing and maths each term. These inform next steps and help teachers and the leadership team to identify groups of children who need support.
- We use rigorous regular low stakes quizzes to support remembering. For example, children throughout the school do weekly quizzes on maths facts with the aim of beating their P.B..
- We keep 'Best Bits Books' containing samples of the children's work. These are updated termly.
- Children annotate the work they choose for these books;
- The leadership team uses teacher RAGs, summative data from termly tests and end of year teacher assessment to track attainment and progress of all pupils. These are analysed and set against local and national standards, feeding into the school's priorities for development.

### **Develop positive attitudes to lifelong learning across the curriculum, inside and outside**

We believe that a school teaches in 3 ways: what it teaches, how it teaches and by the kind of place it is. We value special events and traditions and the importance these have for our school's culture. As a small school, relationships between adults and children are vital - we are very aware of being role models for our pupils. We also value the role of families in learning, and expect open communication with parents, listening sensitively and responding thoughtfully to their queries and concerns.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Classroom doors are left open.
- Teachers readily become involved with clubs and evening events.
- We have many traditions that belong to the children e.g. the Leavers' Revue, the Egg Race, School Journey.
- Staff and pupils really enjoy their work at this school, and this is communicated to our many visitors.
- Year 6 pupils have roles and responsibilities in the school, such as setting up assembly, showing prospective parents round every Wednesday morning and being buddies to our youngest pupils.

- We have a weekly newsletter with a border designed by a different child each week.
- Parents organise celebrations and representations of our community. For example, the creation of postcards, a tea-towel and a calendar of children's art-work.

### **This is a learning community**

At Eleanor Palmer, there is a common purpose and shared responsibility amongst children, parents, staff and governors. All are actively committed to the life, growth and development of this school. There is intellectual challenge for everyone and a culture of learning and questioning practice.

Teachers share a common understanding achieved through discussion, consideration of practice, the sharing of information and whole school planning of important issues. Teachers are thoughtful and self-critical. Teachers' individuality is valued but some autonomy must be sacrificed for coherence, consistency and shared standards in school life.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice:

- Between 2013 and 2021 we were a National Teaching School leading a partnership of over 30 schools. This partnership work continues with our work with the Institute of Education, and Camden Learning, for example
- We are very open to prospective teachers doing observations.
- We expect teachers to be motivated individuals who are open to new ideas and enquiry.
- Staff really talk, listen and debate at meetings!
- The performance management cycle is well established for all staff.
- Attendance of CPD opportunities and further study is positively encouraged and supported. For example, many staff members pursue additional study such as studying for GCSE maths, completing their ME or a degree.
- Staff write an extended reflection of each term, including successes and priorities and this informs their planning meeting with the Headteacher.
- We actively seek to build partnerships with local organisations to enrich the learning of pupils and teachers.