

ELEANOR PALMER PRIMARY SCHOOL

A POLICY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

As a school, we aim:

- 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 and
- 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 common 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 to pursue topics of interest. Allowing children to think and work creatively develops self-confidence and builds up key learning skills e.g. how to manage their own behaviour, their understanding of the learning process, their preferred learning style, their ability to think systematically, to manage information and to learn from others.

We believe these key skills and attitudes are best developed within a motivating cross-curricular thematic approach. Our aim is to create a rich and varied curriculum, meeting national requirements but uniquely developed by us.

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 are:

- Each class has an over-arching topic each term (occasionally half term in EYFS) 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;
- We have a specific fund to support work with arts groups and artists;
- Teacher's personal enthusiasms and passions are positively encouraged and backed;
- Teachers use each other's expertise and during their PPA time, may work alongside colleagues sharing particular expertise;
- We value children's individual responses and independence of thought and
- We have several special events e.g. the Egg Race and Red Nose Day, which encourage creative thinking and innovation.

Make learning vivid and real

As teachers we work hard to plan interesting and engaging work that stimulates imaginations. We maximise first hand and practical experiences using as many resources (objects, artefacts, people, places) as we can find. 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 are:

- 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 School Association 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;
- Our termly planning matrix allows teachers to plan work in blocks and
- Children are actively 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

Inclusion and success make for success

Eleanor Palmer is an inclusive school. The achievements, attitudes and well being of every person in the school matters. This is made evident in our ethos and values. All staff instinctively attempt to overcome children's barriers to learning.

We regard pupils equally in relation to their individual needs. As a staff, we constantly consider teaching style, environment, rules and expectations of behaviour to ensure that every child is feeling confident happy and secure.

There are good supports in place for 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 are:

- It is expected that work be differentiated to at least 3 broad levels, with the overarching principal that the class works together on the same theme;
- 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 support teachers and learning support assistants who work closely with classteachers to offer additional support;
- We have good relationships with a range of other professionals and value their support and advice in meeting children's needs;
- We have a Rights Respecting School Council which meets fortnightly;
- When we do a whole school art theme, we ensure every child's painting is displayed;
- Our unique music scheme means that every child can learn a stringed instrument for 3 years, fully funded by the school;
- Our school is filled with high quality work on display that reflects current topic work;
- There are regular mentions in our weekly newsletter for a range of achievements;
- Our Friday assembly is a celebration of the children and their achievements. Teachers mention individual children who come to the front and receive a clap and a sticker and
- Children's opinions are regularly sought through questionnaires, discussions and suggestion boxes.

Set high standards

We have high expectations of staff in terms of commitment and professionalism, classroom organisation, display and personal expectations of the children.

We have high expectations of learners and the effort they should put into learning at school and at home, and what they can achieve. We set great store by subject knowledge and as such children should be 'taught lots of stuff': topics should be planned so as to include lots of information and interesting facts.

Examples of how this looks policy looks in practice:

- The vast majority of staff are here by 8am and/or until at least 6pm;
- Staff meetings begin on time 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 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 ;
- Sympathetic and carefully thought out colours should be selected for mounts and backing paper;
- Classroom display boards should be covered by half term, with work that reflects the term's theme;
- 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 and
- The quality of work expected from the children is high.

Children should experience excellence

We recognise and value high achievement and create opportunities for those children who excel, where relevant, to compete beyond the school.

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. Each teacher has personal strengths too and is encouraged to share these with their class or by leading a club.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice are:

- Each term we welcome experts into school to enhance topic work, for example an explorer, an anthropologist, a basketball coach, a professional folk violinist and 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 create regular opportunities to work with artists;
- We belong to the LA Library service and so books are always new and relevant to the term's topic and
- We give children time to complete work and 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 are:

- Topics are planned for the year, at the start of the year, ensuring that different subjects take priority, essentially, one history led, one geography led and one science led.
- There is no expectation that every subject is taught every week, every term, rather 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 planning files are kept by each teacher and are available to the Head and Deputy, inspectors and students on request and
- Teachers are expected to actively research and plan ahead for opportunities to use the museums and galleries of London.

Teaching technique matches learning need

Teachers working at this school must be strong in the full range of teaching techniques. We believe in matching teaching technique and strategy to learning need and objectives – fitness for purpose – and as such, a week's lessons should include whole class direct teaching and modelling, ability group work, mixed ability 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. 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 are:

- Groups are flexible so teachers can respond to different rates of progression and appropriate next steps;
- All teachers have set pupil places relevant to context and need;
- There are opportunities at other times for children to choose where to sit and who to work with, to increase motivation;
- Clear defined space for whole class teaching, and tables arranged to facilitate group and individual teaching;
- We regularly share 'tips' for teaching techniques at staff meetings;
- We make good use of 'talk partners';
- There are many real opportunities for co-operative group work;
- Our youngest children learn songs and stories with actions and
- We make good use of visual resources 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 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 are:

- We start each topic finding out what the children already know and what they would like to find out;
- We make good use of 'talk partners' and 'hot seating' ;
- Our Head takes Years 5 and 6 for a weekly problem solving lesson in maths;
- The plenary is seen as a vital part of the lesson, and is used to further extend children's thinking and to test possibilities for next steps;
- Children's questions are always responded to and valued and
- We positively encourage inquisitiveness and intellectual curiosity!

We have a growth mindset culture

A key concept which shapes the ethos of our school is **growth mindsets** based on the work of Carol Dweck. Rather than simply praising success we praise effort and persistence.

We believe the best thing to do is to teach children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning. For children who find work easy we make sure they encounter more difficult tasks. Our children recognise that effort, persistence and good teaching are what help them improve.

If children have fixed mindsets they find it hard to cope with failure: we teach our children to see mistakes and failure as positive. This makes for a very energetic and inclusive culture. It also has a really positive effect on our ethos and on how children approach learning and support each other.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice are:

- 'Good mistake' is a constantly used phrase in class. Children know that mistakes are how we learn, and that failure is part of learning.
- We always mark giving 'prompts for improvement' in writing and 'next steps' in maths so that all learning for all children, even the very brightest, is seen as a way to grow.
- You won't find charts on the wall listing times table results in rank order or stars for behaviour;
- We don't have set ability groups that are fixed for the year;
- Children strive to improve their PB (personal best) in times table tests rather than seeing coming top as the goal.

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. We place great store by this style of formative assessment for learning during lessons. We also value 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 on each child.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice are:

- All work where possible is marked alongside the child. If not alongside then before the next lesson;
- Why work is happening and what needs to happen next to improve is always discussed and explained;
- 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;
- We keep all formal assessment levels in computer files, tracking each class in maths and English, alongside contextual data on each child and
- We use the Progress Toolkit module that allows analysis of this data.

Develop learning skills and personal qualities across the curriculum, inside and outside the classroom

We believe that a school teaches in 3 ways; what it teaches, how it teaches and by the kind of place it is. Involving the children in roles and responsibilities beyond the classroom contribute to our ethos and sense of community. We place a high value on these expecting them to be carefully planned and well used. We also value special events and traditions and the importance these have for our school's culture.

As a small school relationships between adults and the role models these offer the children are vital. We want parents, children and staff to enjoy school!

We value the role of families in learning and expect good open communication with parents, listening sensitively and responding thoughtfully to their queries and concerns.

Examples of how this policy looks in practice are:

- Classroom doors are left open;
- Teachers readily become involved with extras such as 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 for the school, such as setting up assembly, showing prospective parents round every Wednesday morning and helping in the office;
- We have a weekly newsletter with a border designed by a different child each week and
- Parents have recently organised the creation of postcards, a tea-towel and a calendar of the 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 are:

- Since 2013 we have been a National Teaching School leading a partnership of over 30 schools;
- 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 at meetings;
- The performance management cycle is well established for all staff;
- Attendance at courses and further study is positively encouraged and supported;
- Staff write an extended reflection of each term, including successes and priorities and this informs their planning meeting with Kate;
- Many staff pursue additional study, such as studying for GCSE maths, completing their MA or a degree and this is encouraged by the school; and
- We actively seek to build partnerships with local organisations to enrich learning.