

# St. Mary's Catholic Primary School

## Ysgol Catholig Santes Fair



## Teaching and Learning Policy

Reviewed and approved by Governors.

**Curriculum Leader:** Mr L Watkins

# Our Mission Statement



**As a Catholic family,  
we will do our best to live and  
learn as Christ taught us.**

Our aims are designed to allow us to live out the Mission Statement.

## School Aims

- a. To create a community where love, peace and joy are present and to be true to the values of the Gospel and to make our Catholic faith alive by building such a community.
- b. To develop a dynamic interaction between home, school and parish and provide a formation for each child to realise their full potential in all aspects of spiritual and moral development.
- c. To develop a zest for life and an enjoyment of learning.
- d. To allow children to respect all forms of life.
- e. To achieve high standards in academic learning.
- f. To develop creativity and a love of art, music and drama.
- g. To encourage children to learn physical skills and a knowledge and control over their own bodies to compete against themselves and others in order to raise their performance.
- h. To have experience of the Welsh Language and be introduced to Welsh culture and others from around the world to reflect the cosmopolitan nature of our school.
- i. To make sense of the world around them scientifically and by understanding other people, their history and their environment.

# Rationale

The teaching and learning that takes place in our school will have as its core, two key principles which are:

- ◆ The need to allow pupils to develop their relationship with God, in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church and with our own Mission Statement and
- ◆ The need to prepare pupils for the complexities of life in the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We have agreed a Pupil Profile in which we aim to develop the virtues noted below in all that we do. There are myriad opportunities to do this throughout the curriculum. As well as aiming to achieve academic excellence we will also do all we can to foster these virtues.



**Grateful** and **generous**, **Attentive** and **discerning**, **Compassionate** and **loving**, **Faith-filled** and **hopeful**, **Eloquent** and **truthful**, **Learned** and **wise**, **Curious** and **active**, **Intentional** and **prophetic**.

Our school is a ‘Community of Enquiry’. We are a **Building Learning Power** school. It is a place in which pupils are encouraged to apply their skills to practical problems across the curriculum.

## Professor Guy Claxton, author of Building Learning Power.



We plan learning in a way that encourages the development of the natural curiosity with which children are born. We will produce tenacious learners who exhibit resilience and “grit”. Our children will enjoy difficult learning as they increasingly realise that it needs to be tough in order to make the best possible leaps forward in their development and maturation as learners. They will be the *generators of knowledge* as well as the receivers of it. Learning here will be a positive experience and it will be fun.

We recognise that successful people tend to have:

- ◆ a broad vocabulary and
- ◆ an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge.

**E.D. Hirsch** (2016) noted that ‘*once the centrality of knowledge (not general skills) is fully grasped by educators and the wider public, the right to parity of knowledge among young pupils will come to be understood as a civil right.*’ In recognition of this, the curriculum at St. Mary’s identifies a programme of **core knowledge domains**. These domains are relatively short, covering between two and four weeks. They are designed to allow for high quality progression and for cyclical learning. The aim of this curriculum is to produce independent pupils with a positive disposition towards learning and with extensive vocabularies and knowledge.

## E. D. Hirsch. He developed the Core Knowledge Concept.



This emphasis on vocabulary and knowledge development is essential, as we know that children from under privileged families, on average, hear 30 million words less than their peers who have experienced more advantaged circumstances before they begin formal schooling. It is our Catholic duty to do all we can to help these children and this approach puts into practice the Church's preferential option for the poor. It mitigates what is known as the '**Matthew effect**' (*'for anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away'. Matthew 13:12*).

Thinking critically and logically is not possible without the thinker possessing relevant background knowledge. We also know that background knowledge is a pre-requisite for the development of cognitive skills (they can't be taught in isolation). **Willingham (2009)** makes the key point that *'not only does background knowledge make you a better reader, but it also is necessary to be a good thinker. The processes that we must hope to engender in our students- thinking critically and logically-are not possible without background knowledge'*. St. Mary's Core Knowledge Curriculum is designed to make a significant contribution in this area for all of its learners. Several implications flow from the points made here:

- ◆ **What knowledge do we teach our children?** In relation to reading, we need to teach them the information that authors omit and assume that the reader knows. Without this knowledge, they will not be able to read the breadth of material that high attainers across the country can, nor with the depth of comprehension. Unless this happens, they will be at risk of under-achieving. In reality, much of this knowledge will be the body of information known by people who attain best in education. This approach reflects the thoughts of the philosopher G. H. Mead who noted that *only full membership of the tribe leads to [true] individuality*. The domains will, in general, cover familiar academic areas such as: Ancient Civilisations (African, Native American, Greek and Roman), Astronomy, The Dark Ages, The Middle Ages, The Renaissance, Shakespeare, The Industrial Revolution, The World Wars, Rivers, The World's Oceans, The Geography of Wales, Light and Sound, The Human Body, Senses and Magnetism for example.
- ◆ **We need to ensure that the knowledge base is mostly in place before we teach critical thinking skills.** This is because we know that learners need to have the necessary knowledge at their disposal before they can think critically. An implication of this is that critical thinking skills will need to be worked on towards the end of domains disproportionately. An illustration of this point could be made for any domain but in *Geology*, for example, it would be pointless to ask pupils why fossils of animals such as elephants and hippopotamus have been found around Europe without first teaching them about plate tectonics.
- ◆ **Shallow knowledge is better than no knowledge.** Some knowledge needs to be known in-depth however, sometimes just a little can be sufficient. This is particularly true in relation to reading when a reference point is needed in order to make sense of text.
- ◆ **We need to do all we can to encourage our children to read.** This is because books expose them to more facts and to a broader vocabulary than virtually any other activity. Developing a love of reading in our children may well be the greatest thing we can do for them in the academic sense.

## Highly effective teaching of reading is vital.



Therefore, the attitude towards reading modelled by staff and the teaching skill in evidence is vitally important.

- ◆ **We must ‘start early’.** All of the principles noted above will apply from the day a child joins the school’s Nursery. Indeed, we need to go a step further and ensure that our transition activities emphasise to parents the importance of the experiences their children have pre-school in relation to reading, vocabulary development, visits to places of interest and to experimenting in the natural world.

We recognise that in order for core knowledge and vocabulary to be stored in the long term memory learning needs to be planned in a way that ensures that pupils spend a good deal of time thinking about them. The key concept is that **‘whatever you think about, that’s what you remember. Memory is the residue of thought’ (Willingham, 2009)**. The implication of this is that our pupils need to be able to remember what things mean; therefore, the goal for all teachers is to get them to think about meaning.

Clarity of thought is an essential element in this philosophy and therefore, our school places great emphasis on the development of thinking skills. St. Mary’s is an Advanced Thinking School and it does this expertly. We acknowledge that there is no such thing as a generic critical thinking skill; rather, we aim to develop the particular type of thinking that is demanded by the task in hand. We realise that, for example, the critical thinking needed to play an instrument successfully is very different from that needed when making sense of the causes of the Great War. Knowledge is needed in order to develop thinking skills successfully (*see point two above*).

We are a ‘Gospel School’ and therefore, all teaching and learning activities occur with the teachings of the Gospel in mind. Our principles and aims are clearly laid out in our Mission Statement and in our Pupil Profile.

The remainder of this policy will address the following areas:

- ◆ Effective Teaching,
- ◆ Effective Learning,
- ◆ The Classroom Environment,
- ◆ The Planning of Learning,
- ◆ Assessment for Learning,
- ◆ The Role of the Governors and Parents and
- ◆ The Presentation of Learning.



# Effective Teaching

Our teaching will always endeavour to foster a love of learning in all pupils as we work to develop the knowledge and skills that will be needed for them to craft happy lives in the future.

Teachers will continually strive to develop their skills in the following **four key areas**:

**Orchestration:** as they plan learning that is aimed at furthering pupils' ability to learn, their knowledge and their key skills. Activities will be planned to allow for individual, paired, group and whole class learning. There will be an emphasis placed on practical learning that will allow pupils opportunities to consolidate skills learnt as they relate them to the 'real world'. The knowledge and vocabulary to be learnt is planned, in detail, for each year group. Core Knowledge principles will be applied to practice. Learning will flow from regular 'Read Aloud' sessions. The curriculum is thoroughly well planned across all year groups into a series of 'Domains'. There will always be a pause point between domains to allow for re-teaching and for the re-assessment of past domains. An ambitious approach to differentiation will be taken. Teachers will identify ambitious, common learning objectives and then ensure that all pupils are able to enjoy and benefit from opportunities to engage effectively with them (see <https://teacherhead.com/2019/01/24/rescuing-differentiation-from-the-checklist-of-bad-practice/>) We believe that this approach is at the heart of real and genuine differentiation that is aimed at encouraging every pupil to learn at the edge of their current skill and knowledge level.

**Commentating:** as they ensure that pupils' efforts are always met with a positive response. Self-esteem can be built upon or greatly damaged, according to the reaction of teachers. Therefore, teachers will, in both the oral and written forms, bear this in mind. More details can be found in our Marking Policy which, in turn, forms a part of the Assessment Policy.

**Questioning is one of the key areas of teacher:pupil interaction. Key strategies identified include:**

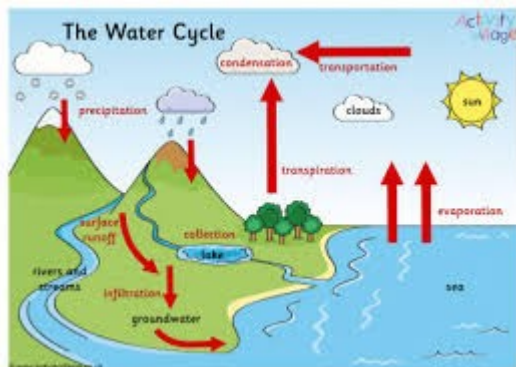
- ◆ Cold calling (the teacher chooses who responds, to allow questioning to be purposeful),
- ◆ No 'opt-out' (returning to an unsure pupil to establish understanding),
- ◆ Say it again better (to increase the quality of an answer; just correct, often isn't good enough),
- ◆ Think-pair-share (giving space for reflection and collaboration),
- ◆ Whole class response (facilitating rapid assessment to allow for adjustments to be made to teaching in a formative manner).
- ◆ Probing (asking multiple questions in order to elicit a depth of response).

These strategies relate to the principles of **Barak Rosenshine** (Sherrington, 2019).

**Modelling:** as they lay bare their own learning experience to pupils, both positive and negative so they realise that everybody in our community is a learner. During lessons, teachers will model good learning strategies and exemplar solutions. This modelling might take place as a planned part of any stage of a lesson, or it may result from a point of uncertainty that arises. Plenary sessions often provide fertile ground to do this successfully.

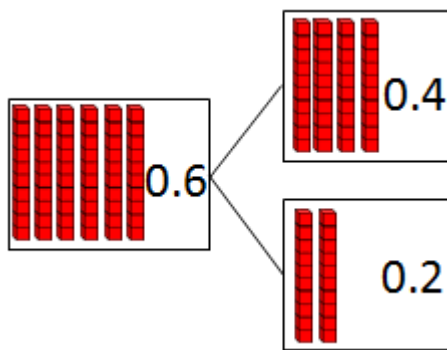
We recognise that the provision of models is a central feature of giving good explanations. These may take the form of:

- ◆ **Physical representations of completed tasks.** Exemplars make for good scaffolds; a model paragraph or closing statement for example.
- ◆ **Conceptual models** such as those for the water cycle



The Water Cycle; an example of a useful conceptual model.

or the use of arrays of numbers to represent fractional amounts for example.



Arrays provide a clear visual representation.

This may also involve the use of writing frames which help to give structure to writing and the use of helpful acronyms such as ‘PEE’ = point, evidence, explain.

- ◆ **Explicit narration** in which we model the thought processes involved in solving problems or in creative learning.

**Explaining:** as they enter into dialogue with pupils about the very nature of learning. It is vital that our pupils develop an appreciation of the fact that our prime academic aim is to give them the knowledge, vocabulary and learning skills that will last them a lifetime. This emphasis on core knowledge and ‘meta-learning’ is key to our overall strategy aimed at raising standards further.

Teachers will clearly explain to pupils the learning objective for each lesson. They will pause regularly during lessons to discuss pertinent learning points and all lessons will conclude with a plenary session in which good learning is celebrated, errors are ‘taught out’ and ways forward discussed. Furthermore, most days conclude with a discussion on the day’s learning during which further challenges are often highlighted.

Teachers will aim to spend as near to 100% of their time as possible each day teaching. Sometimes this will be at the whole class scale, sometimes with various sized groups and sometimes with individuals.

The concept of ‘focussed teaching’ (which is a standard part of Foundation Phase pedagogy) will feature prominently throughout the school.



**Focussed teaching is a very effective strategy.**

Teachers will not be ‘desk based’ in their practice as we recognise that this approach is not good use of teacher time. It encourages queues of children waiting for attention; rather our approach involves teachers teaching within a positive classroom culture that provides a range of strategies for pupils to apply when they are ‘stuck’ or ‘finished’.

Many lists are available about the traits of the successful teacher (see *Teacher Development Profile*). However, in summary from a child’s point of view, just two are repeatedly identified by research. In question form they are:

- a) **Does the teacher seem like a nice person?** and
- b) **Is the class well organised?**

There are clear implications in these questions for all staff. We will keep them at the forefront of our minds in our daily work.

## Effective Learning

Learning is most effective when it takes place in a ‘Community of Enquiry’. Teachers continually model and reward good learning in our school. They work to develop pupils’ core knowledge and their skills in the following learning dispositions:

**Resilience:** as they encourage pupils not to be demoralised as problems occur in their learning but rather to see them as exciting challenges to be overcome. Resilience is broken down into the following capacities: absorption, managing distractions, noticing and perseverance.

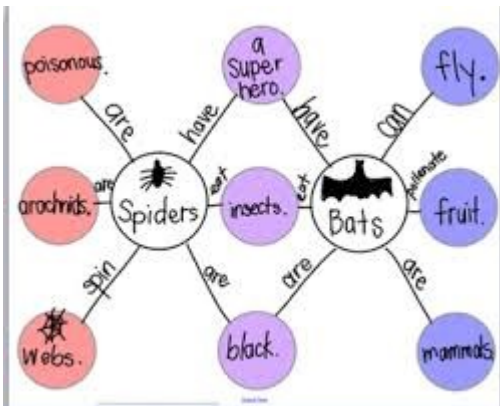
**Resourcefulness:** as they aid pupils to develop their range of learning strategies so that they become increasingly ready, willing and able to learn in different ways, using both internal and external resources effectively. Resourcefulness is broken down into the following capacities: questioning, making links, imagining, reasoning and capitalising.

**Reflectiveness:** as they encourage pupils to become increasingly strategic about their learning both in terms of looking backwards at what they have done and forwards at what they propose to do. Reflectiveness is broken down into the following capacities: planning, revising, distilling and meta-learning.



**Reciprocity:** as they develop pupils' skills of learning alone or with other people. For this to occur at its best, a sense of independent judgement needs to be fostered and high levels of communication skills are required. Reciprocity is broken down into the following capacities: interdependence, collaboration, empathy and listening and imitation.

These dispositions all demand high quality **thinking skills**. Our school has incorporated Professor Graham Donaldson's Four Core Purposes, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and the Digital Competency Framework into its curriculum planning. A wide range of strategies aimed at developing the level of our pupils' thinking skills are used throughout the school. In addition to BLP development, all staff employ the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy and Dr. David Hyerle's Thinking Maps.



Thinking Maps can greatly enhance the quality of learning.

Staff also have the freedom to introduce other useful strategies to develop thinking skills such as De Bono's Thinking Hats or Art Costa's Habits of Mind for example. All of the above strategies are used bearing in mind the fact that pupils need to have the related and requisite knowledge in order to develop their thinking skills effectively.

To this end, our school has developed an effective partnership with the Centre for Cognitive Development at Exeter University, whose definition of a thinking school is **an educational community in which all members share a common commitment to giving regular, careful thought to everything that takes place.**

## The Learning Environment

The quality of the learning environment is a key factor in the provision of high standards in education.

Teachers are responsible for the provision of a stimulating and pleasant learning environment within their classrooms and broader learning environments. The following are agreed expectations:

- ◆ Many displays will be interactive in nature so that they become a key factor in both consolidation and extension of the key skills and concepts taught.
- ◆ Pupils' work will be celebrated through display.
- ◆ We will avoid covering display space with posters and signs.
- ◆ Display will be changed regularly.
- ◆ The same principle will apply to corridor and hall display, to which all staff will contribute.

- ◆ Each area will have a focal point for prayer, which will be updated regularly. It will be related either to the current Church Season or to the 'Come and See' topic being studied. It will be inter-active in nature.
- ◆ The process of learning will be given high priority.
- ◆ The language of learning will be prominent.

## The Planning of Learning

Staff have planned a detailed annual programme of Core Knowledge Domains for each year group. They have been designed to cover a broad range of topics across the Areas of Learning. Leaders ensure that coverage and progression is appropriate (a wide range of curriculum documents are in place which illustrate this). The domains take account of the 'Four Purposes' as identified in 'Successful Futures' and of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. This 'St. Mary's Core Knowledge Curriculum' facilitates high quality learning both with a global and local perspective; knowledge about Wales with its unique geography and history features strongly.

In addition to this planning, teachers keep ongoing formative field notes about pupils' learning and progress in their teacher files. They include any relevant additional information that may be necessary to plan effectively.

## Assessment for Learning

High quality assessment has a central role to play in the quest for the highest standards possible. The school's procedures are laid down in detail in our Assessment Policy. Our key principles, in summary are:

- ◆ Day to day informal assessment plays a key role in the raising of standards. A positive teacher attitude is essential. Formative assessment takes priority.
- ◆ 'Closing the Gap' marking is employed.
- ◆ Individual targets are set.
- ◆ Two formal assessment periods occur in November and May.
- ◆ Pupils are fully involved in the assessment process.
- ◆ Each pupil has the opportunity to reflect on learning in a manner appropriate to their age and attainment level.

# The Role of Support Staff

All Cover Supervisors and Learning Support Officers have a vital role to play in the implementation of this policy. They will:

- ◆ Attend all relevant INSET.
- ◆ Work closely with teachers throughout the learning process, contributing effectively to planning, teaching and assessment.
- ◆ Model the process of effective learning to pupils.
- ◆ Adopt a positive attitude towards pupils and to the learning process.

# The Role of Parents

We recognise that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children and that they play a key role in the quality of education that their children receive at school. Namely:

- ◆ To take a keen interest in their children's learning and to discuss it with them often.
- ◆ To work with their children at home, when possible and in particular, to read to and with them.
- ◆ To ensure that home-learning set is completed on time and returned to school.
- ◆ To fully support the school's Code of Conduct and to insist that their children follow it.
- ◆ To attend the teacher consultations that are offered to discuss progress and a way forward.

# The Role of Governors

It is the role of governors to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning at our school is of high quality. They do this in the following ways:

- ◆ Receive termly reports from the Headteacher (sometimes delegated to other leaders) about standards in teaching and learning.  
This may include:
  - the outcome of the MER process that is part of the School's Identified programme of Self-Evaluation,
  - Assessment data from End of Key Stage Assessment, WG National Tests and other assessment undertaken.
- ◆ Receive a termly report from a Curriculum Leader about progress in one specific Area of Learning.
- ◆ Receive reports from external bodies such as the Archdiocese of Cardiff, LA, the CSC and ESTYN.

- ◆ They are always welcome to arrange visits to the school in order to work with staff and pupils. This gives opportunities for a less formal, but more informed judgement to be arrived at.
- ◆ They play a key role in the Headteacher's Performance Management cycle and so they directly contribute towards future school targets with regard to teaching and learning.
- ◆ Receive an annual review from the Headteacher on the progress made in teaching and learning in the target areas identified in the School Development Plan.

## The Presentation of Learning

Pupils will be taught by staff to present all learning in a manner that is appropriate for the task being undertaken.

General expectations are that:

- ◆ The date will be written in full, except in Mathematics, when a numerical version is acceptable.
- ◆ The title of each piece of learning will be written in the form of the learning objective (this will often take the form of 'WALT' –We Are Learning To).
- ◆ The date and title will be neatly underlined by pupils when they reach a point of maturity and independence which allows them to do so.
- ◆ Teachers will encourage pupils to take a pride in their studies and to present their learning as neatly and as orderly as they can, according to their ability and stage of maturity.
- ◆ We recognise that much learning needs to go through a 'rough' stage when drafting and revision take place. The guidance above therefore, applies to completed learning, that is being 'published' in some form.

## References

*The Gospel of St. Matthew.* Chapter 57, verse 56.

Donaldson, G. (2015) *Successful Futures*. Welsh Government.

Hirsch, E.D. (2016) *Why Knowledge Matters*. Harvard Education Press.

Mead, G.H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. University of Chicago Press.

Sherrington, T. (2017) *The Learning Rainforest*. John Catt Education.

Sherrington, T. (2019) *Rosenshine's Principles in Action*. John Catt Education.

Willingham, D. T. (2009) *Why Don't Students Like School*. Jossey-Bass.