



Learning in the Cygnets

At Southrop C of E Primary School, our pedagogy is rooted in the belief that young children learn best through purposeful play, exploration, and meaningful interaction within a well-organised and enabling environment. Continuous provision forms the foundation of our approach, providing consistent opportunities for children to apply, rehearse, and extend their learning independently while being supported by skilled adult facilitation.

Our Pedagogical Principles

Our teaching and learning approach across Reception and Key Stage 1 is underpinned by the following principles:

1. **Child-Centred Learning:** We recognise that all children are unique, with individual interests, abilities, and developmental pathways. Our pedagogy values choice, curiosity, and independence, giving children ownership over their learning. Through open-ended resources and continuous access to learning areas, children learn to make decisions, solve problems, and take responsibility for their progress. We ensure that experiences are developmentally appropriate and meaningful, enabling all learners to feel successful.
2. **Learning Through Play and Exploration:** Play is central to learning. It allows children to make sense of the world, test ideas, and develop creativity, resilience, and communication. Our environments are rich in opportunities for investigation and discovery, where play becomes a vehicle for deep, meaningful learning across all curriculum areas. We foster sustained shared thinking through purposeful interactions, ensuring that play leads to progression as well as enjoyment.
3. **Active Teaching Within a Responsive Environment:** Adults are not only instructors but also facilitators and co-learners. Teachers and teaching assistants engage in high-quality interactions, observing, questioning, extending vocabulary, and scaffolding understanding, to ensure that every moment has purpose. Learning intentions are clearly planned but remain flexible to respond to children's emerging needs and interests. We use a balanced approach that includes both child-initiated learning and high-quality adult-led instruction, recognising that some foundational skills require direct modelling, guided practice, and explicit teaching.
4. **Progressive Continuity Across Phases:** Our pedagogy ensures a smooth transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1. We build upon the strong foundations of the EYFS by maintaining elements of play and exploration, while introducing increasing levels of challenge and independence. This approach supports cognitive, emotional, and social development, ensuring that all children experience success and a love of learning. We maintain familiarity in routines and environments, supporting confidence and security during transition.
5. **Integration of Curriculum and Environment:** Continuous provision is carefully mapped to both the EYFS Framework and the National Curriculum. Each provision area (e.g. writing, maths, construction, small world, art, fine motor, sand/water, role play, and reading) provides authentic contexts in which children can apply taught skills and knowledge. The environment acts as a "silent teacher," providing ongoing reinforcement of key concepts and encouraging cross-curricular learning, and deepening children's understanding through repetition, practice, and purposeful challenge.

6. **Purposeful Planning and Challenge:** Activities are designed to meet the needs of all learners through differentiated, colour-coded challenges that align with developmental stages and curriculum expectations. As the week progresses, adults introduce additional provocations and extensions, enabling deeper learning and greater independence. Our planning ensures that foundational knowledge and skills, particularly in communication, reading, writing, and mathematics, are clearly sequenced and practised until secure, in line with national evidence on the importance of fluency for future success.
7. **High-Quality, Responsive Assessment:** Assessment is continuous, meaningful, and rooted in professional judgement. Rather than relying on surface-level evidence or task completion, adults use observation, questioning, and responsive interactions to understand what children know, can do, and need next. This enables timely intervention, ensures misconceptions are addressed early, and supports adaptive teaching. Assessment informs the design of continuous provision, targeted groups, and adult-led sessions, ensuring learning never happens by chance.
8. **Prioritising Language and Communication:** Language is the foundation of all learning. We prioritise rich vocabulary, high-quality talk, story experiences, questioning, and oral composition. Daily opportunities for speaking and listening, within both play and adult-led teaching, support cognitive development, reading comprehension, and writing. Systematic approaches to phonics, handwriting, and early reading are embedded to ensure children develop the strong language and literacy foundations they need to thrive.
9. **Holistic Development: Physical, Social, Emotional and Cognitive:** Our pedagogy recognises the importance of developing the whole child. We value personal, social and emotional growth, independence, resilience, and self-regulation. Physical development is prioritised through both fine and gross motor opportunities, recognising the role of movement, coordination, and physical confidence in supporting attention, writing, and overall wellbeing. Outdoor learning and fundamental movement skills form a key part of our curriculum.
10. **Research-Informed Practice:** Our pedagogy is grounded in educational research:
 - **Piaget (1952)** highlighted that development occurs in stages, not ages, and that children under seven benefit from experiences supporting holistic growth rather than premature academic instruction.
 - **Alistair Bryce-Clegg (2020)** emphasised the importance of familiarity in learning environments, noting that high engagement leads to high attainment.
 - **Julie Fisher (2010)** asserted that what matters most is not when a child starts school, but that experiences are appropriate for their developmental stage.
 - **Strong Foundations (DfE/Ofsted, 2024)** reinforces the importance of a clear, sequenced curriculum; high-quality adult interaction; systematic development of foundational skills (particularly communication, reading, writing and number); responsive assessment; and the value of both play and direct teaching.

These principles underpin our belief that effective continuous provision promotes engagement, independence, and lasting understanding.

The Role of the Adult

Adults in our setting play a vital role in ensuring that learning is purposeful, progressive, and grounded in high-quality interaction. In line with the Strong Foundations guidance, adults act as:

- **Facilitators of learning:** Adults create rich opportunities for children to think, experiment, and problem-solve. Through skilful dialogue, modelling, vocabulary extension, and responsive questioning, they move learning forward. Interactions are intentional, with adults drawing on their subject knowledge to support children's understanding and correct misconceptions.
- **Observers, assessors and responsive practitioners:** Informed by Strong Foundations, adults use continuous observation, not as a record-keeping exercise, but as a tool for understanding what children know and can do. Professional judgement guides next steps, identifies gaps, and ensures timely intervention. Assessment is embedded within daily interactions, enabling teaching to be adapted in the moment.
- **Role models:** Adults demonstrate the qualities we want children to develop: curiosity, persistence, collaboration, critical thinking, and confidence. They model language structures, problem-solving approaches, and positive behaviour, ensuring that children are immersed in rich oral language and high-quality examples of learning behaviours.
- **Designers of environments:** Adults carefully curate learning environments that promote independence, sustained engagement, and meaningful application of skills. In line with *Strong Foundations*, spaces are designed to support a clear, well-sequenced curriculum—providing opportunities for practice, reinforcement, and progression rather than unfocused activity. The environment acts as a "silent teacher," encouraging purposeful play and enabling children to revisit and consolidate core skills.
- **Explicit Teaching Followed by Independent Application:** Teachers ensure that core skills, particularly in communication, early reading, writing, and mathematics, are explicitly and systematically taught, as emphasised in Strong Foundations. Once concepts have been introduced and modelled, adults provide opportunities for children to apply these skills independently within continuous provision.

Adults monitor engagement closely, assessing understanding through conversation, observation, and responsive questioning. Where gaps or misconceptions arise, they plan targeted interventions, small-group sessions, or adjusted provision to secure the strong foundations children need to progress confidently.

The Learning Environment as Pedagogy

The environment is not simply a backdrop to learning; it is an active and intentional part of our pedagogy. In line with Strong Foundations, our learning environments are designed to support a clear, well-sequenced curriculum and to ensure that children have repeated, meaningful opportunities to practise and embed foundational knowledge and skills.

Each area is intentionally designed to:

- Encourage independence through accessibility, clear routines, and predictable structure so that children can make purposeful choices without unnecessary adult direction.
- Promote collaboration and communication, recognising that spoken language is central to cognitive development and underpins reading, writing, and wider learning.
- Support sustained shared thinking and problem-solving, enabling adults to join children in high-quality interactions that extend ideas, correct misconceptions, and introduce new vocabulary.

- Offer open-ended materials that invite creativity, exploration, reasoning, and application of taught concepts, ensuring learning is not left to chance but built on prior teaching.
- Reflect current themes and curriculum priorities, ensuring provision reinforces the key strands of a sequenced curriculum (e.g., number, phonics, fine and gross motor skills, vocabulary) while remaining flexible and responsive to children's interests.
- Provide opportunities for practice and fluency, ensuring children revisit essential skills—such as early reading behaviours, number sense, mark-making, and motor development—through repeated, purposeful experiences.
- Avoid overload, ensuring that resources and activities remain focused on what is most important for children's development, preventing dilution of key learning, as highlighted in Strong Foundations.

Pedagogical Impact

Our pedagogy ensures that children develop strong foundations—academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Through a balance of explicit teaching, high-quality interaction, purposeful provision, and a well-sequenced curriculum, children become confident and capable learners.

Our pedagogy develops confident, capable, and reflective learners who:

- Demonstrate independence, resilience, and curiosity, supported by environments that empower them to make decisions and manage their learning.
- Engage deeply in sustained learning experiences, with adults who extend thinking, challenge misconceptions, and provide rich opportunities for talk and reasoning.
- Apply and transfer skills across contexts, showing that core concepts (e.g., number, phonics, vocabulary) are securely understood and can be used flexibly in new situations.
- Collaborate effectively with peers, developing communication, negotiation, and social awareness through structured and unstructured interactions.
- Show strong communication and problem-solving abilities, supported by a language-rich curriculum and high-quality adult modelling.
- Develop physical confidence and coordination, benefiting from planned opportunities for fine motor development, gross motor skills, and fundamental movement patterns.
- Take pride in their learning environment and contributions, recognising it as a shared space that supports their growth and reflects their achievements.

Overall, our approach ensures that children leave the Early Years and Key Stage 1 with secure foundations for future learning.