# Stanwix School

## Early Years policy 2026-2027

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| Policy owner | Education Standards and Safeguarding committee |
| Approved by | Chair of ESS on behalf of the Trustee Board |
| Date of policy | September 2026 |
| Review date | September 2027 |

*Together we learn, together we grow, together we thrive.*

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*together we thrive.*

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## 1. Legislation

This policy is based on requirements set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers, dated 13 July 2026 and effective from 1 September 2026.

## 2. Structure of the EYFS

The Early Years Foundation Stage applies to children from birth to the end of the reception year. At Stanwix Primary School children are admitted to reception in the September following their fourth birthday. The school's EYFS provision comprises its Reception classes; the school does not provide nursery provision.

## 3. Policy Statement

At Stanwix School, we believe that the Early Years Foundation Stage provides the foundations for a child's future learning, development and wellbeing.

Our Early Years provision is built around a carefully considered balance of high-quality direct teaching, purposeful play, natural provision, continuous provision and responsive adult interaction. We recognise that young children learn best when they feel safe, secure and valued, and when they have the time, space and resources to explore, investigate, practise, revisit and apply what they know.

We provide a rich learning environment both indoors and outdoors, recognising that outdoor learning is not an additional experience but an integral part of our EYFS curriculum. Children are supported to make choices, develop independence, follow their interests and become deeply involved in their learning.

Alongside this, we provide clear and purposeful teaching of the knowledge and skills children need to succeed. Short, focused whole-class and small-group inputs are used where they add value, including daily phonics and mathematics teaching. These are followed by opportunities for children to apply and deepen their learning through provision and play.

Our approach reflects the EYFS principle that children learn through a combination of play, adult modelling, observing others and adult-guided learning.

At Stanwix, we have particularly high expectations for communication and language, early reading, writing, mathematical understanding, independence and positive relationships.

**4. Our EYFS Aims**

We aim to:

- provide every child with the best possible start to school;
- recognise every child as a unique individual with their own strengths, interests, experiences and starting points;
- develop confident, independent and resilient learners;
- create a safe, nurturing and language-rich environment where children feel they belong;
- provide a curriculum that is ambitious, purposeful and responsive to children's needs;
- develop strong communication and language skills across all areas of learning;
- develop a genuine love of books, stories, rhymes and reading;
- ensure that children develop secure phonic knowledge through the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised programme;
- develop strong foundations in number through the Mastering Number programme;
- provide meaningful opportunities for children to develop writing skills across the curriculum and throughout the provision;
- provide rich indoor and outdoor learning experiences;
- use natural and open-ended resources to encourage curiosity, creativity, problem-solving and sustained thinking;
- provide extended periods of purposeful play and exploration;
- ensure adults interact skilfully with children to extend vocabulary, thinking, knowledge and learning;
- identify children who need additional support quickly and provide timely intervention and Keep-Up opportunities;
- work closely with parents and carers;
- ensure all children, including those with SEND and those facing barriers to learning, are appropriately supported and challenged;
- prepare children effectively for the next stage of their education.

## 5. The EYFS Curriculum at Stanwix

The EYFS curriculum covers the seven areas of learning:

**Prime areas**

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

**Specific areas**

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

The three prime areas underpin children's learning and development. They are strengthened through the specific areas, with learning carefully connected across the curriculum.

At Stanwix, we do not see the seven areas as separate subjects. Instead, we provide children with opportunities to make meaningful connections between their learning.

For example, a child building a bridge outdoors may be developing physical coordination; mathematical understanding; problem-solving; communication and vocabulary; cooperation; understanding of materials; drawing and early writing and imaginative thinking.

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At Stanwix School, we ensure that our environment and curriculum also support the three characteristics of effective teaching and learning:

**Playing and exploring** – Children have opportunities to investigate, experience and 'have a go'. Through purposeful play, they explore the world, develop ideas, learn to solve problems, communicate with others and understand rules.

**Active learning** – Children are encouraged to concentrate, persevere and enjoy their achievements. They develop confidence, independence and the ability to make choices, taking ownership of their learning.

**Creating and thinking critically** – Children are encouraged to develop their own ideas, make connections and find solutions. Adults support this by showing interest, asking open-ended questions, offering encouragement and helping children extend their thinking.

At Stanwix School, we believe these characteristics are equally important and work together to support children's development. We provide a balance of planned, purposeful play, adult-led activities and child-initiated learning, giving children the freedom to explore resources and develop their learning.

*Together we learn, together we grow,*

*together we thrive.*

## 6. Our Approach to Teaching and Learning

Our approach is based on the understanding that high-quality EYFS practice combines direct teaching and learning through play.

Children experience:

- short, focused whole-class teaching;
- small-group teaching;
- targeted adult-led activities;
- independent exploration;
- child-initiated play;
- continuous provision;
- indoor learning;
- outdoor learning;
- opportunities to practise and apply taught knowledge;
- responsive interactions with skilled adults.

Whole-class teaching is deliberately short, purposeful and developmentally appropriate. We avoid unnecessary periods of children sitting and listening.

Whole-class and small-group inputs are particularly important for the explicit teaching of:

- phonics;
- early reading;
- mathematics;
- vocabulary and knowledge;
- stories, rhymes and texts;
- key concepts and skills.

Children then have opportunities to apply this learning independently and through play.

## 7. Planning

Planning at Stanwix is informed by the Early Learning Goals, Development Matters, children's individual starting points, and ongoing assessment. Practitioners consider children's needs, interests, strengths and stages of development when planning a challenging, enjoyable and purposeful learning experience.

Our planning identifies the intended learning and provides opportunities for children to develop and apply knowledge and skills across the seven areas of learning. Discrete teaching is planned for key areas such as phonics, early reading and mathematics, while opportunities are also created for children to follow their interests and pursue meaningful learning through continuous provision and play.

Planning is responsive and flexible. Practitioners use observations, assessment information and their knowledge of individual children to identify next steps and adapt provision. Where children have additional needs, including SEND, planning takes account of these needs and appropriate support or specialist advice is sought where necessary.

Practitioners plan the learning environment carefully, both indoors and outdoors, so that it supports children's independence, curiosity, interests and development. Resources and experiences are selected to provide appropriate challenge, encourage children to make choices and enable them to revisit, practise and apply their learning.

Planning reflects the different ways in which children learn and ensures an appropriate balance of adult-led teaching, adult-guided experiences, purposeful play and child-initiated learning. Medium-term planning provides an overview of intended learning, while day-to-day provision is adjusted in response to children's emerging needs, interests and progress.

## 8. Indoor and Outdoor Provision

At Stanwix, the indoor and outdoor environments are viewed as one interconnected learning environment.

Our provision is carefully organised to promote:

- independence;
- exploration;
- communication;
- physical development;
- creativity;
- problem-solving;
- mathematical thinking;
- literacy;
- understanding of the natural world;
- cooperation and social development;
- sustained shared thinking.

Resources are accessible and purposeful. Children are encouraged to select, combine and use resources in their own ways.

Provision is reviewed regularly so that it remains relevant to children's developmental needs, interests and current learning.

Effective continuous provision provides children with a consistent environment in which they can explore, make choices, become independent and demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning.

**9. Natural Provision**

Natural materials and open-ended resources are an important feature of our EYFS environment.

Children are encouraged to explore and use materials such as:

- wood;
- stones;
- shells;
- leaves;
- sticks;
- pinecones;
- logs;
- sand;
- water;
- mud;
- fabric;
- cardboard;
- boxes;
- recycled and loose parts.

Natural and open-ended resources encourage children to think creatively rather than simply follow predetermined outcomes.

They provide opportunities for children to:

- investigate;
- compare;

- classify;
- build;
- design;
- problem-solve;
- imagine;
- communicate;
- collaborate;
- develop physical skills;
- develop mathematical understanding.

Adults support children to think deeply about what they are doing rather than taking over the learning.

**10. The Role of the Adult**

The quality of adult interaction is central to our EYFS practice. Continuous provision is supported and extended through high-quality adult interactions. Practitioners use evidence-informed strategies, including guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2025), to develop pupils' thinking and language. Structured interaction frameworks such as SHREC and STAIRS are used. Adults are not simply supervisors of children's play. They are skilled partners in learning.

Practitioners:

- observe carefully;
- listen attentively;
- follow children's interests;
- model language;
- introduce new vocabulary;
- model skills and behaviours;
- demonstrate how to use resources;
- ask purposeful questions;
- encourage children to explain their thinking;
- challenge misconceptions;
- encourage children to persevere;
- scaffold learning when needed;

- know when to step in and when to step back;
- extend children's ideas;
- make connections to previous learning;
- encourage children to reflect and solve problems.

We recognise that effective interaction does not mean constant questioning or adult direction.

Sometimes the most effective adult response is to watch, listen and allow children time to think.

At other times, adults will deliberately intervene to extend learning, introduce vocabulary, model a new skill or deepen children's understanding.

Our aim is for interactions to be purposeful, responsive and rooted in the child's current learning and development.

**11. Play and Sustained Learning**

Play is central to our Early Years curriculum.

We provide children with sufficient time to become deeply involved in their learning, revisit ideas, practise skills and develop sustained thinking.

Children are encouraged to:

- choose resources;
- make decisions;
- develop their own ideas;
- work collaboratively;
- revisit previous learning;
- solve problems;
- persevere when things are difficult;
- use language to communicate their thinking;
- develop increasingly complex play.

Adults use play as an opportunity to extend children's knowledge and vocabulary while ensuring that children retain ownership of their learning.

**12. Early Reading**

Reading is a priority at Stanwix School.

We want every child to become a confident, accurate and enthusiastic reader and to develop a lifelong love of books.

Our early reading approach combines:

- systematic synthetic phonics;
- high-quality stories and texts;
- daily opportunities to enjoy books;
- vocabulary development;
- reading practice;
- opportunities to talk about books;
- opportunities to develop comprehension;
- close monitoring of children's reading progress.

We use Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised as our systematic synthetic phonics programme.

Phonics is taught daily through a clear, systematic progression. Stanwix currently teaches phonics for approximately 20 minutes each day in Reception and this gradually increases to 30 minutes a day towards the end of Reception.

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Children are taught to:

- hear and identify sounds;
- recognise graphemes;
- develop secure phoneme-grapheme correspondences
- blend sounds to read words;
- segment words for spelling;
- read tricky words;
- apply their phonic knowledge when reading and writing.

**Reading Practice**

Reading practice is carefully timetabled so that children have regular opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge to fully decodable books.

Reading practice is delivered in line with Little Wandle guidance, with three weekly sessions that progressively develop decoding, prosody and comprehension skills.

**13. Mathematics**

At Stanwix School, we believe that high-quality mathematics teaching in the Early Years lays the foundations for lifelong learning, confidence and curiosity in mathematics. Our EYFS mathematics provision ensures that all children develop strong conceptual understanding, mathematical language and positive learning behaviours through carefully structured teaching, purposeful play and high-quality interactions.

Our EYFS curriculum aims to:

- Develop children's understanding of number, numerical patterns, shape, space and measure.
- Build secure, "sticky" knowledge through revisiting, recapping and applying learning in meaningful contexts.
- Ensure all children interact and engage meaningfully with mathematical concepts.
- Reduce gaps in attainment and support children to achieve the Early Learning Goals.
- Mathematical learning is embedded across the curriculum and within meaningful contexts.

We use Mastering Number as our core programme to teach Number and Numerical Patterns. This approach promotes deep conceptual understanding through practical activities, visual representations, mathematical talk, and opportunities for children to explore and apply their learning in meaningful contexts.

**High-Quality Maths Teaching at Stanwix School**

High-quality mathematics teaching at Stanwix School includes:

- Learning broken into small, manageable steps, with regular opportunities to recap, revisit and secure sticky knowledge.
- Active participation, application and high expectations for all learners, with appropriate challenge and support.
- Teaching that reflects EYFS principles, balancing adult-led learning with child-initiated exploration, engagement and enjoyment.

**Learning Environment**

The EYFS environment is purposeful, well-organised and supported by clear routines that promote independence, curiosity and motivation. Resources and defined areas encourage mathematical thinking, exploration and appropriate challenge. The environment reflects the EYFS Framework's emphasis on learning through play, exploration and active involvement.

**Adult-Led Learning**

- Daily small-group sessions recap prior learning and introduce or consolidate new concepts.
- Practitioners model accurate mathematical vocabulary and encourage children to explain their thinking.
- Groups are flexible and informed by assessment and individual needs.

**Continuous Provision**

- Provision is high quality, purposeful and closely aligned to current and prior learning.

- Mathematics is embedded across all areas, enabling children to apply skills meaningfully through play and exploration.
- Practitioners scaffold learning through effective questioning, modelling and shared problem-solving to deepen conceptual understanding.

**EYFS Mathematics Lesson Structure**

- **5–10 minutes:** Whole-class review of previous learning and, where appropriate, new learning.
- **5 minutes:** Modelling expectations and explaining enhancements to continuous provision.
- **Main session:** A balance of child-directed continuous provision with high-quality adult interaction and teacher-led small-group sessions.

**14. Assessment For Learning**

At Stanwix School, assessment is an integral part of everyday teaching and learning. We use a range of approaches to understand children's knowledge, skills and understanding, identify their strengths and recognise areas where they may need further support.

Practitioners use ongoing observation, effective questioning, scanning and checking to assess children's understanding, identify misconceptions and respond to their individual needs. Random selection is used to ensure that all children have opportunities to participate and that practitioners gain an accurate picture of each child's learning.

Assessment information is used to identify children's next steps, inform future planning and provide timely support or intervention where needed. Practitioners draw on Development Matters alongside their professional knowledge and understanding of each child to ensure that learning is appropriately challenging and supports continued progress.

Assessment is a continuous process and is used to enhance children's learning rather than interrupt it. We value what children know and can do and use this information to provide purposeful experiences that build on their interests, strengths and individual development.

**15. Parents and Carers**

When families and practitioners work together, children benefit from a strong, consistent approach to their learning, development and wellbeing. We aim to build positive, respectful partnerships through a two-way sharing of information, knowledge and expertise.

We develop these partnerships by:

- outlining the Reception curriculum at the new parents' meeting in July and phonics meeting in September, helping families understand how they can support learning at home;
- encouraging parents and carers to complete the home/school admissions booklet and share information about their child's interests, development and needs;
- operating an 'open door' policy, enabling parents and carers to discuss concerns, achievements and developments informally with staff;

- inviting parents and carers to support in school and accompany children on school visits;
- providing regular communication and updates through ClassDojo;
- encouraging families to read regularly with their child and record comments about reading progress in the home/school reading diary;
- supporting families to develop their child's phonics and early mathematical skills;
- inviting parents and carers to attend parents' evenings, meetings and workshops where possible, including opportunities to discuss individual targets and next steps.
- valuing parents' and carers' knowledge of their child when assessing progress and planning future learning.

Through these strong home-school partnerships, we ensure that families feel informed, valued and involved in their child's learning and development.

**16. Safeguarding and Welfare**

We recognise that children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them.

The school maintains appropriate statutory staff-to-child ratios and ensures that at least one person with a current paediatric first aid certificate is available whenever children are present, including on outings.

We promote good oral health through discussions about the importance of brushing teeth, regular dental visits, the effects of consuming too many sugary foods, and making healthy snack choices. We also follow Early Years food safety guidance to ensure children are protected from food-related hazards.

From 1 September 2026, screen use in Reception is limited, carefully planned, age-appropriate and linked to a clear learning, communication or accessibility purpose. Screens do not replace high-quality adult interaction, practical play, stories, physical activity or outdoor learning.

**17. Transition**

We recognise that effective transition supports children's emotional wellbeing and provides continuity in their learning and development. We work closely with children, families and previous settings to ensure that every child has a positive and well-supported start to Reception and a smooth transition to Year 1.

Before children start Reception, we gather information about their:

- interests and strengths;
- development and communication;
- family circumstances;
- additional needs; and
- previous experiences.

Where appropriate, we work with nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, SEND professionals and families. Transfer records from pre-school settings provide valuable information about children's needs, development and learning. During the Summer Term, teachers and/or teaching assistants contact or visit feeder nurseries to speak with staff and, where possible, observe children in a familiar environment.

A member of staff also contacts parents and carers to welcome them to Stanwix School, discuss the transition process and offer another opportunity to visit the school if needed.

A new parents' meeting is held in July to introduce school expectations and routines, explain the induction process and outline the Foundation Stage curriculum. Parents and carers have the opportunity to meet the class teacher and visit the classroom. They also receive a Reception information document outlining the curriculum and school routines to share with their child, along with a starting school document containing ideas to support their child's transition into school.

In summer term, Reception children attend a transition session, giving them the opportunity to see their classroom, meet some of their peers, meet their teachers and teaching assistants, and take part in activities. In September, home visits provide another opportunity for children to become familiar with staff and build confidence in preparation for starting school. Home visits also give parents and carers the opportunity to speak with teachers, ask questions and share important information about their child.

Children then start school on a staggered basis. They initially attend two half-day sessions in smaller groups, followed by sessions where the whole class stays until after lunch. Children then begin attending school full time.

Transition to Year 1 is also carefully planned. Reception and Year 1 staff share relevant information about each child's attainment, strengths, interests and areas for further development, ensuring that learning and support can continue effectively.