



**St Mary's Primary School
Banbridge**

Curriculum Overview



Updated May 2025

Our Vision

Safe. Valued. Empowered to Thrive.

Our Mission

We are dedicated to creating a **safe**, nurturing, and inclusive environment where every individual feels **valued**, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

We inspire a love of learning, foster a sense of belonging, and cultivate the skills, values and resilience needed to **thrive** in a diverse and ever-changing world.

Core Values

Family
Community
Respect
Resilience
Kindness
Tolerance
Perseverance
Responsibility

At St Mary's Primary School, we are committed to delivering a curriculum that not only meets statutory requirements but also reflects our core vision—ensuring every child feels safe, is valued, and is empowered to thrive in all aspects of life.

As Individuals – Safe and Supported: We nurture each child's personal growth, emotional wellbeing, and self-awareness. By creating a safe and caring environment, we help pupils build confidence and resilience, empowering them to manage their learning and lives with independence and self-belief.

As Contributors to Society – Valued and Connected: We promote active citizenship, empathy, and respect for others. Pupils are encouraged to engage positively with their communities, appreciate diversity, and contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of others—knowing that their voice and actions are valued.

As Contributors to the Economy and Environment – Empowered to Thrive: We equip pupils with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to succeed in the world of work and to make responsible, informed decisions about the environment. Through creativity, innovation, and sustainability, children are empowered to thrive in a changing world.

Learning and Teaching at St Mary's Primary School

Our teachers use a broad and balanced range of teaching methods to ensure that all children are actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences. Lessons are thoughtfully planned to include a mix of whole-class, group, and individual activities, tailored to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of our pupils.

We place a strong emphasis on interactive, practical, and enjoyable learning, recognising that children learn best when they are actively involved and having fun. Our classrooms are designed to be positive and stimulating environments that nurture curiosity, creativity, and a love of learning.

Teachers encourage children to take ownership of their learning by involving them in planning, carrying out, and reflecting on their work. This approach helps to build confidence, independence, and a deeper understanding of the learning process.

Curriculum Policy Statement

The Northern Ireland Curriculum, introduced in 2007, revised in 2017, spans all 12 years of compulsory education. It is designed to place the learner at the centre of the educational experience, focusing not only on knowledge and understanding but also on the development of essential skills and personal capabilities.

At St Mary's Primary School, the Board of Governors, Principal, and Teaching Staff are fully committed to delivering the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We aim to provide a broad, balanced, and inclusive curriculum that supports each pupil's academic and non-academic development, preparing them for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship. Our curriculum:

- Promotes the holistic development of every child
- Encourages active engagement in the learning process
- Celebrates achievement in all its forms
- Develops the skills, concepts, and knowledge necessary for future learning and living

We work in close partnership with parents, recognising the vital role they play in supporting their child's education. Our dedicated and enthusiastic staff strive to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment, where all pupils are encouraged to reach their full potential—regardless of race, gender, age, or ability.

At St Mary's, we understand that the term 'curriculum' encompasses all learning opportunities provided by the school, both within and beyond the classroom.

Overview of the Curriculum at St Mary's Primary School

At St Mary's Primary School, we are committed to delivering a broad, balanced, and engaging curriculum that supports the development of the whole child. The school is organised into the following **Key Stages**:

- Foundation Stage: Years 1 and 2
- Key Stage 1: Years 3 and 4
- Key Stage 2: Years 5, 6, and 7

Throughout these stages, pupils develop their knowledge, skills, and understanding through rich, active learning experiences across six **Areas of Learning**:

Language and Literacy: Including Talking and Listening, Reading, and Writing. This area promotes effective communication and a love of language and literature.

Mathematics and Numeracy: Focusing on the development of mathematical understanding and numeracy skills, applied across the curriculum.

The Arts: Including Art and Design, Drama, and Music. This area encourages creativity, self-expression, and appreciation of the arts.

The World Around Us: Covering Geography, History, Science, and Technology. Pupils explore their environment and develop inquiry, investigation, and problem-solving skills.

Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU): Focusing on emotional development, social skills, health education, relationships and sexuality education (RSE), and mutual understanding in both local and global contexts.

Physical Education / Physical Movement: Promoting physical development, coordination, teamwork, and healthy lifestyles through play and a variety of physical activities.

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

At the heart of success across all areas of the curriculum is the development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC). These essential skills prepare children for lifelong learning and help them to function effectively in a rapidly changing world.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum identifies five key areas of TSPC, which are embedded across all learning experiences at St Mary's Primary School:

Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making (TPSDM): Children learn to:

- Sequence and order information
- Make predictions and justify their thinking
- Evaluate outcomes and reflect on their decisions

Self-Management (SM): Children are supported to:

- Set personal learning targets
- Organise and plan their work
- Sustain attention and manage their time
- Review their learning and seek advice when needed

Working with Others (WO): Pupils develop the ability to:

- Listen actively and respectfully
- Value the opinions of others

- Use negotiation and compromise
- Collaborate and suggest improvements

Managing Information (MI): Children are taught to:

- Select, classify, compare, and evaluate information
- Collate, record, and represent data effectively
- Consider the needs of different audiences

Being Creative (BC): We encourage pupils to:

- Experiment with new ideas
- Take risks in their learning
- Learn from and value the ideas of others

These capabilities are not taught in isolation but are **woven into everyday classroom practice**, helping children become confident, independent, and reflective learners.

Cross-Curricular Skills – CCEA Guidance

At St Mary's Primary School, we recognise the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics, and Using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as essential foundations for learning. These skills are central to the Northern Ireland Curriculum, as outlined by CCEA, and are developed progressively across all areas of learning. These core skills are:

Communication: Encompassing talking and listening, reading, and writing, communication enables pupils to express themselves clearly and confidently in a variety of contexts. It is embedded across the curriculum and supports learning in every subject.

Using Mathematics: This skill focuses on applying mathematical concepts and processes in real-life and cross-curricular contexts. Pupils are encouraged to think logically, solve problems, and make informed decisions using numerical data.

Using ICT: Pupils develop the ability to handle and present information, use digital tools creatively, and evaluate the effectiveness of their work. ICT is integrated across the curriculum to enhance learning and digital literacy.

A Whole-School Responsibility

In line with CCEA's expectations, the development of these skills is the shared responsibility of all teachers. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils can transfer, apply, and use these skills effectively in a range of meaningful contexts, both within and beyond the classroom.

Communication – Aligned with CCEA Progression Pathways (2024)

Communication is central to the Northern Ireland Curriculum and underpins all learning. At St Mary's Primary School, we aim to develop pupils' ability to express themselves clearly and confidently across a range of contexts and media. Communication includes Talking and Listening, Reading, and Writing, and is supported by non-verbal communication and the use of digital technologies.

Pupils should be able to communicate and express themselves:

- Socially – building relationships and engaging with others
- Emotionally – articulating feelings and developing empathy
- Physically – using body language and movement to support expression
- Academically – sharing ideas, reasoning, and understanding across the curriculum

Communication encompasses the core modes of:

- Talking and Listening
- Reading
- Writing

We recognise that effective communication includes:

- Non-verbal communication – such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language
- Wider literacy – including visual, media, and digital literacies
- Multimodal communication – using a combination of text, images, sound, and video
- ICT and multimedia tools – enabling pupils to communicate creatively and effectively in the digital age

By developing strong communication skills, pupils are empowered to engage meaningfully with others, contribute to society, and become confident, articulate individuals. Across the curriculum, and at a level appropriate to their ability, pupils are enabled to develop the following skills:

Talking and Listening: Pupils should be enabled to:

- Listen actively and respond appropriately in discussions, explanations, role plays, and presentations
- Contribute relevant comments, ask questions, and respond to others' viewpoints
- Communicate ideas, opinions, feelings, and imaginings using an expanding vocabulary
- Structure their talk clearly so that ideas are understood by others
- Adapt their speech to suit different audiences and situations
- Use non-verbal methods (e.g. facial expressions, gestures) to enhance communication and engagement

Reading: Pupils should be enabled to:

- Read a range of texts for information, enjoyment, and understanding
- Apply a variety of reading strategies with increasing independence
- Locate, select, and use information from a range of sources
- Explore and interpret ideas, events, and features in texts
- Use evidence from texts to support opinions and responses

Writing: Pupils should be enabled to:

- Talk about, plan, draft, and edit their writing
- Communicate meaning, feelings, imaginings, and ideas clearly and in an organised way
- Present ideas in a variety of forms and formats, using both traditional and digital tools, for different audiences and purposes
- Write with increasing accuracy, fluency, and proficiency

Using Mathematics

Using Mathematics is the skill of applying mathematical concepts, processes, and understanding in a variety of meaningful contexts. We aim to develop pupils' mathematical thinking through real-life, relevant, and engaging experiences, in line with the Northern Ireland Curriculum and CCEA guidance. Across the curriculum, and at a level appropriate to their ability, pupils are enabled to:

- Choose appropriate materials, equipment, and mathematical methods for a given task or situation
- Apply mathematical knowledge and concepts accurately and confidently
- Work systematically, checking their work for accuracy and reasonableness
- Use mathematics to solve problems and make informed decisions
- Develop and apply strategies, including mental maths techniques
- Explore ideas, make and test predictions, and think creatively and flexibly
- Identify, collect, and organise information relevant to a task
- Read, interpret, and present information in a range of mathematical formats (e.g. tables, charts, diagrams)
- Use mathematical language to ask and answer questions, explain thinking, and discuss methods
- Develop financial capability, understanding money, budgeting, and value
- Use ICT tools to support problem-solving and present mathematical work effectively

Using ICT: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays a vital role in developing pupils' knowledge, understanding, and experience across the curriculum. In line with CCEA guidance, we aim to provide pupils with a broad range of real-world, purposeful digital experiences, enabling them to become informed, responsible, and creative users of

technology. All teachers are responsible for embedding ICT into their teaching, ensuring pupils develop digital skills across all Areas of Learning. The curriculum requirements for Using ICT are structured around five key areas, often referred to as the **5 'E's**:

Explore: Pupils learn to:

- Access, manage, and interpret digital information
- Research, select, and process data
- Investigate, predict, and solve problems using digital tools
- Understand how to stay safe online and demonstrate acceptable digital behaviour

Express: Pupils are encouraged to:

- Create, develop, and present ideas using text, sound, images, and multimedia
- Use a range of digital tools to produce and publish content creatively

Exchange: Pupils develop the ability to:

- Communicate and collaborate using digital platforms
- Share and develop ideas through email, video conferencing, and online discussions

Evaluate: Pupils are supported to:

- Reflect on their work and the digital processes used
- Review and improve their outcomes, considering both the process and the product

Exhibit: Pupils learn to:

- Manage and present their digital work
- Organise files and folders effectively to showcase their learning

Areas of Learning

Language and Literacy is a core Area of Learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It focuses on developing pupils' ability to communicate clearly, confidently, and creatively, enabling them to interact effectively with the world around them. We aim to foster a lifelong love of language and literature, helping children become enthusiastic, reflective, and informed communicators.

Teachers support pupils in developing knowledge, understanding, and skills in:

Talking and Listening

- Engaging in purposeful discussions, role plays, and presentations

- Listening actively and responding appropriately to others
- Expressing ideas, feelings, and opinions clearly and confidently
- Adapting speech for different audiences and purposes

Reading

- Reading a wide range of texts for enjoyment, information, and understanding
- Using a variety of strategies to read with increasing independence
- Exploring meaning, structure, and language in texts
- Using evidence to support opinions and interpretations

Writing

- Planning, drafting, editing, and improving written work
- Communicating meaning clearly and effectively in different formats
- Writing for a range of purposes and audiences using both traditional and digital tools
- Developing accuracy, fluency, and creativity in written expression

Our Approach: We are committed to creating a language-rich environment where children are immersed in high-quality texts and meaningful communication. Through carefully planned experiences, we:

- Encourage a love of reading by providing access to diverse and engaging literature
- Set high expectations for all learners, supporting each child to reach their full potential
- Promote cross-curricular literacy, ensuring that language and literacy skills are developed across all Areas of Learning
- Use the CCEA Progression Framework to monitor and support each child's development in communication skills from Foundation Stage through Key Stage 2.

Mathematics and Numeracy

Mathematics and Numeracy is a key Area of Learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It equips children with the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to make sense of the world around them. Through engaging, real-life contexts, pupils learn to solve problems, make decisions, and process everyday information with confidence and accuracy.

We aim to develop pupils' mathematical thinking through a balanced and progressive approach that fosters curiosity, creativity, and resilience. Key Areas of Learning: Teachers support pupils in developing knowledge, understanding, and skills in:

- Processes in Mathematics: At the heart of all mathematical learning, this area focuses on how children learn. It includes problem-solving, reasoning, communicating mathematically, and applying strategies in a variety of contexts.
- Number: Understanding number relationships, place value, operations, and mental strategies for calculation.
- Measures: Exploring and applying concepts of length, weight, capacity, time, and money in practical situations.

- Shape and Space: Recognising, describing, and exploring the properties of 2D and 3D shapes, position, movement, and direction.
- Handling Data: Collecting, representing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from data using appropriate methods and tools.

Our Approach: We place Processes in Mathematics at the core of all teaching and learning in this area. This ensures

The Arts is a statutory Area of Learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It comprises three interconnected strands: Art and Design, Drama, and Music. Through The Arts, children are encouraged to express their individuality, imagination, and creativity—skills that are closely linked to all aspects of their learning and personal development.

Art and Design activities enable pupils to:

- Observe and respond to their environment and experiences
- Express personal thoughts, feelings, and ideas visually
- Develop and use their imagination and creativity
- Solve problems and create purposeful designs or products
- Explore a wide range of media, techniques, and processes
- Use art and design vocabulary to reflect on and evaluate their own and others' work

Drama provides opportunities for pupils to:

- Express thoughts, ideas, and emotions through verbal and non-verbal communication
- Explore roles, characters, and situations in imaginative ways
- Build confidence, empathy, and social interaction skills
- Engage in drama through play-based learning, storytelling, and structured activities
- Reflect on experiences and develop understanding through performance and role-play

Music enables pupils to:

- Explore and express feelings through sound and rhythm
- Engage in musical activities as individuals, in groups, and as a whole class
- Develop skills in the three core areas of composing, performing, and listening:
 - ✓ Composing: Experimenting with sounds and musical ideas to create original pieces
 - ✓ Performing: Singing or playing instruments to express musical ideas and build confidence
 - ✓ Listening and Responding: Developing focus, appreciation, and the ability to reflect on their own and others' music

Our Approach: At St Mary's Primary School, we provide rich, inclusive, and progressive learning experiences in The Arts. These experiences are designed to:

- Foster creativity and self-expression
- Support emotional wellbeing and communication

- Encourage collaboration and appreciation of others' contributions
- Develop whole-curriculum skills and personal capabilities

Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU): Our PDMU programme is designed to support each child in developing holistically through the two key strands outlined by CCEA:

Personal Understanding and Health: We aim to help children:

- Develop self-awareness, confidence, and emotional intelligence.
- Understand and manage their feelings and behaviours.
- Make healthy lifestyle choices and understand the importance of physical activity and personal safety.

Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community: We encourage children to:

- Build positive relationships and respect for others.
- Understand diversity, inclusion, and the importance of active citizenship.
- Develop moral thinking, values, and the ability to make informed and responsible decisions.

Through engaging, age-appropriate activities, our programme fosters:

- Emotional, social, and physical well-being.
- Confidence, independence, and responsibility.
- Skills for lifelong learning and participation in society.

This approach ensures that children are equipped to lead healthy, safe, and fulfilled lives, while contributing positively to their communities.

Physical Development and Movement (PDM)

Physical Development and Movement is a key Area of Learning in the Foundation Stage. It provides children with rich opportunities to explore, enjoy, and develop a wide range of fundamental movement skills in both structured and unstructured environments. Our programme supports children in:

- Developing gross and fine motor skills through activities that promote co-ordination, control, balance, locomotion, and manipulation.
- Gaining confidence and self-esteem through physical success and participation.
- Understanding the importance of physical activity for health, well-being, and fitness.
- Learning about safe practices, spatial awareness, and how to share space respectfully with others.

Children engage in a variety of physical activities including:

- Athletics
- Games
- Dance
- Gymnastics

We ensure that all children have access to daily physical activity, both indoors and outdoors, through:

- Physical play in stimulating environments.
- Planned Physical Education sessions, encouraging individual, paired, and group participation.

The World Around Us (WAU) is a key Area of Learning in the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum. It nurtures children's natural curiosity and helps them explore and understand the world through the lenses of Geography, History, and Science and Technology. Teachers guide children in developing knowledge, understanding, and skills across four interrelated strands:

- Interdependence
- Place
- Movement and Energy
- Change Over Time

These strands are not taught in isolation. Instead, teachers make meaningful connections across them, embedding the key curriculum elements such as personal understanding, mutual understanding, and thinking skills. This integrated approach ensures that learning is relevant, engaging, and reflective of real-world experiences.

Children are encouraged to:

- Use their senses to observe and explore.
- Sort, classify, compare, and predict.
- Plan, experiment, and review their findings.
- Develop enquiry-based learning skills, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2.

In the Foundation Stage, learning is primarily play-based, fostering curiosity and discovery. As children progress, they engage in more structured, enquiry-led investigations that promote critical thinking and problem-solving.

Our pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that ensures rich experiences across the **three statutory contributory elements**:

- Geography: understanding places, environments, and how people interact with them.
- History: exploring the past and how it influences the present.

- Science and Technology: investigating the natural and physical world through observation and experimentation.

Religious Education at St Mary's Primary School is rooted in the **Grow in Love** programme, which supports children's spiritual development and prepares them for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

Our pupils, their families, the school chaplain and parish groups play an active role in nurturing the spiritual life of our pupils, helping to foster a strong sense of faith and community. We strive to build a school community that is Christ-centred, where the values and teachings of the Gospel are woven into every aspect of school life. We are committed to:

- Upholding the core aims of Catholic education.
- Promoting a caring and supportive environment through effective pastoral care.
- Strengthening our connections with home, parish, and the wider community.

Assessment for Learning at St Mary's Primary School

We view assessment as a vital part of effective learning and teaching. In line with CCEA guidance, assessment is not just about measuring progress—it's about understanding how children learn, identifying their strengths and areas for development, and using that insight to support and enhance their learning journey. Assessment for Learning (AfL) is embedded in our daily classroom practice and includes:

- Active pupil involvement: Children are encouraged to take ownership of their learning by understanding learning intentions, recognising the skills and knowledge they are developing, and reflecting on the strategies they use.
- Effective feedback: Teachers provide meaningful oral and written feedback, including "Marking for Improvement," to help pupils understand what they've done well and how they can improve.
- Peer and self-assessment: Pupils are supported in reviewing their own and others' work, setting personal goals, and identifying next steps in their learning.
- Use of assessment data: Standardised and class-based assessments are used to inform planning, tailor teaching, and track progress.

Assessment information is used to:

- Identify individual and group learning needs.
- Plan the next steps in teaching and learning.
- Make summative judgements at key points, such as the end of a topic or school year.

We are committed to working in partnership with parents/carers, keeping them informed of their child's progress and involving them in their educational journey. In line with the Northern Ireland Curriculum, we provide an annual report on each pupil's achievements across the six Areas of Learning and their development in TSPCs.

Inclusion and Accessibility in the Curriculum: Current Practice and Guidelines

Inclusion is a core principle of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, ensuring that all children—regardless of background, ability, or need—have equal access to meaningful learning experiences. CCEA states that inclusive education is about removing barriers to learning and creating environments where every learner can thrive.

Key Principles of Inclusive Practice

- **Respect for Diversity:** Inclusive education values the uniqueness of every learner, embracing differences in ability, culture, language, and background.
- **Curriculum Access for All:** Schools must ensure that all pupils can access the curriculum through differentiation, flexible teaching strategies, and appropriate support systems.
- **Whole-School Approach:** Inclusion is not limited to classroom practice—it involves the entire school ethos, policies, and community engagement.
- **Early Identification and Support:** Schools are encouraged to identify pupils who may be at risk of exclusion or underachievement and provide timely, targeted support.

Inclusive Strategies in Practice

- **Differentiated Teaching:** Adapting content, process, and outcomes to meet diverse learning needs.
- **Co-operative Learning:** Encouraging collaboration and peer support to build social and academic skills.
- **Use of Technology:** Leveraging digital tools to support accessibility and personalised learning.
- **Flexible Grouping:** Organising pupils in varied ways to promote inclusion and participation.
- **Positive Behaviour Support:** Creating safe, respectful environments that promote emotional well-being.

Inclusive Education pays particular attention to:

- Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Newcomer pupils and those learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- Gifted and talented learners
- Looked-after children, young carers, and those from families under stress
- Pupils at risk of disaffection or exclusion

Partnership and Collaboration: Parents and carers are seen as key partners in supporting inclusive learning. Schools are encouraged to work with external agencies, including advisory services and community support teams, to meet pupils' needs effectively.

Policy Review This policy was updated in May 2025.

It will be updated in line with St Mary's Primary School's Policy Schedule.