



World Around Us Policy

Reviewed June 2026

Introduction

This policy is based on the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum document (2007) which is the starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the needs of individual children. Within these requirements we at Ballyoran Primary School aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to prepare our children for a rapidly changing world. We are a caring and inclusive school where children from all backgrounds and with varied experiences and abilities are valued and encouraged to become good citizens, capable of making positive informed contributions to society.

The school, in an urban setting not far from the centre of Portadown, has adequate school grounds for the pupils to safely explore their immediate environment. There are two playgrounds, an all-weather pitch, a small Eco Garden, an outdoor learning space in the Foundation Stage area which includes a mud garden and a vegetable patch, an outdoor learning classroom for Key Stage 1 and 2 as well as various grassy areas surrounding the premises. Within the wider area, the school is within walking distance of a large park and is a short bus journey from the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre at Oxford Island and many other sites of interest such as the Armagh Planetarium; the Palace Stables Heritage Centre; Navan Fort; Peatlands Park; Gosford Forest Park; Tannaghmore Farm and Gardens.

1. What is the World Around Us?

Children are naturally curious and often ask profound questions about themselves and the nature of the world around them. The purpose of this area of learning is to find age-appropriate answers to some of these big questions from the perspectives of Geography, History and Science and Technology (Pg. 83 N.I. Curriculum Primary).

The World Around Us is one of the six Areas of Learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It focuses on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in Geography, History, Science and Technology. Ballyoran Primary aims to retain the best of current practice within the three subjects, while developing a topic/theme-based approach to this area of learning, and making relevant connections across all areas of learning, while ensuring breadth and balance.

Much research has shown that children learn best when they have concrete or practical experiences of the world around them and when they are given the opportunity to form their own ideas, rather than memorise those provided by others.

In our school, we see the World Around Us as the development of ways of exploring and thinking, to investigate the environment and ourselves. As such, we believe that teaching methods must provide children with the opportunity to:

1. Use their senses to observe objects and happenings in their environment.
2. Ask questions about what they notice.
3. Put forward and try out ideas to answer their questions.
4. Discover which of their ideas are appropriate.
5. Add to their knowledge through their discoveries and so begin to form patterns of ideas (concepts) that will lay a foundation for a gradually more sophisticated understanding of their world.

The World Around Us is presented as four inter-related strands that connect learning:

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

Three contributory elements within the World Around Us:

Geography

Explores the relationship between the earth and its people through the study of the environment, place and space. It develops knowledge of places and environments throughout the world, an understanding of maps and a range of investigative and problem-solving skills both inside and outside the classroom. Children should develop knowledge and understanding of their place in the world, other places and the processes which affect the people, conditions and life in that place. They should explore ideas about people, jobs, the weather and the environment both locally and globally and begin to consider their part in maintaining a sustainable world.

History

Is concerned with the concepts of sequence and time and with evidence, which allows us to find out what happened in the past. The concepts of chronology, change/continuity, empathy and cause and effect will be developed through investigation of life in the past. Children should gain an awareness of their past and changes which have occurred over time through examining evidence, looking at photographs, watching multimedia clips and listening to stories. Children will recognise the importance of evidence in giving a picture of the past but will understand that there can be different interpretations of this depending on how it is viewed.

Science and Technology

Aims to stimulate a child's curiosity in finding out why things happen in the way they do. It teaches methods of enquiry and investigation to stimulate creative thought. Children learn to ask scientific questions and begin to appreciate the way science will affect their future on a personal, national, and global level. Children should have opportunities to develop the skills of Science and Technology and to develop awareness of the relevance and importance of Science and Technology in everyday life in finding out about themselves, the environment, the material and physical world.

Ballyoran is committed to designing learning experiences within World Around Us which ensure a balance of these contributory elements, through the delivery of the four interrelated strands throughout all Key Stages.

2. Aims

- To develop knowledge, understanding and skills in the context of the World Around Us
- To promote understanding, respect and appreciation for the world in which we live and their immediate environment
- To acknowledge and appreciate a sense of the past, changes which have occurred and how these affect the world today
- To develop an appreciation of the relevance and importance of Science and Technology in everyday life
- To develop in children the skills of enquiry, investigation, analysis, evaluation and presentation

3. Skills

‘At the heart of the curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of skills and capabilities for life-long learning and for operating effectively in society. Through opportunities to engage in active learning contexts . . . children should develop Cross Curricular Skills (in Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT) and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.’ (Pg. 5 N.I. Curriculum Primary)

At Ballyoran Primary School we also develop Geography, History and Science skills through the World Around Us. (These skills are listed in Appendix 1) Links with the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework have been highlighted to enable teachers to cross reference both. While many of the skills will be developed incidentally, we also plan for the development of subject specific skills when appropriate.

4. Planning Approaches

The WAU programme will be implemented at a level appropriate to the needs of the children in the context of our school and will also provide opportunities for pupils to explore their world in the context of home, school, the local area and the wider world. All planning is based on the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. When appropriate to the interests and needs of our pupils and teachers and to the relevance of our chosen themes, we will also use the Ideas for Connected Learning, Thematic Units and other guidance material from CCEA and EA in our planning. Teachers devise termly topic planners detailing learning intentions and teaching and learning experiences. At all stages children will be encouraged to become active participants in the planning/learning process. At the

beginning of a new topic, pupils in years 3-7 will be consulted about learning (KWL grids), topics will be flexible to follow pupil interests/environmental factors and plenary sessions will be used to assess learning and teaching.

Planning for Progression and Continuity

Planning for the World Around Us builds on the earlier experiences of children and continues to help them to explore the world they live in. At Foundation Stage, skills and concepts are developed during play and other planned activities relevant to the children's interests and experiences. Careful observation informs the planning of future learning experiences within the World Around Us.

We ensure that the overall programme of learning in any one-year group and across the key stages, is broad and balanced and that there is continuity and progression in children's learning. We are adopting:

‘a spiral approach to the World around Us so that concepts, knowledge and skills are introduced without undue repetition or significant gaps and are reinforced in a variety of contexts.’ (Pg. 85 N.I. Curriculum Primary)

Connected Learning

Recognising the changes and requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, we have begun to plan thematically. We emphasise the totality of the children's learning across the curriculum by making meaningful links across the learning areas. We encourage children to transfer understanding and skills from one context to another, allowing them to practise and apply the skills they have gained.

Our planning for WAU aims to promote:

- Good investigations and the development of children's enquiry skills
- Good use of ICT to support learning and teaching
- Effective use of the school/local environment, educational visits and visitors to the classroom
- Progression in key aspects of Geography, History and Science and Technology

5. Learning and Teaching (see Ballyoran Primary School, Learning and Teaching Policy)

In Ballyoran PS, Learning and Teaching approaches provide suitably challenging opportunities for all pupils to take part in lessons fully and effectively. Learning experiences are active, practical and enjoyable. We make use of a wide range of teaching methods balancing whole class, group and individual activities to engage children in effective learning. In the Foundation stage children experience much of their learning through well planned and challenging play. Children have opportunities to make choices and decisions, developing their own ideas and interests, either as starting points for learning activities or pursuing a topic in more depth. They are supported in taking risks in their efforts to succeed and are actively involved in planning, carrying out and reflecting on their work within the World Around Us Learning Area.

6. Assessment

Assessment in WAU is continuous, formative and child centred, designed to help pupils grow in confidence, independence and scientific/ geographical/ historical understanding. It directly informs planning and teaching to ensure pupils make steady progress.

7. Inclusion

At our school, the World Around Us forms part of the School Curriculum Policy to provide a broad and balanced education to all children. Through our teaching we provide learning opportunities that enable all pupils to make progress. We do this by setting suitable learning challenges and responding to each child's different needs.

The teachers are aware of the requirements of SENDO and plan pupil experiences accordingly. Children will be helped to access this Learning Area using a range of learning styles, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. They are able to record and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways according to their learning needs.

8. Learning in the Outdoors

The outdoor area provides children with one of the best environments in which to learn. As Margaret McMillan (c1925) says, *'the best kept classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky'*.

Our pupils have opportunities to develop skills and concepts in an outdoor learning environment where they will:

- Become more aware of, more observant in and more responsive to their surroundings
- Develop an approach to careful observation, accurate recording and thoughtful analysis
- Encourage an interest in environmental issues
- Foster a sense of wonder and discovery

Children should have the opportunity to study aspects of their own immediate world, including different features of town and countryside and make comparisons between local and wider world issues. Our school grounds are used widely to support this learning, offering a variety of natural and built features that serve as rich stimuli for investigation and exploration. These include:

- A bug hotel that supports biodiversity and observation of mini beasts
- A fruit and vegetable patch for growing and studying plants and food production
- Outdoor classroom that supports group work and reflection
- A mud garden and playhouse that encourage sensory and imaginative play

- An Eco Garden with designated planting areas for hands-on gardening and science investigations
- A selection of trees, shrubs and plants that provide seasonal learning opportunities

Ballyoran PS is a green flag Eco-School. We have an Eco- Council made up of children from primary 4-7 and our senior LSC.

The Eco-Council meet frequently to discuss a range of environmental issues which are then brought to the whole school community for action. Eco activities are integrated into the curriculum across year groups. The Eco-Schools programme provides the opportunity to foster environmental awareness while linking to many curriculum subjects. Eco-Schools aims to educate and empower young people to make positive decisions and become change makers for an environmentally sustainable world.

9. Educational Visits in The World Around Us

Pupils are also provided with the opportunities to take part in workshops and go on trips linked to their WAU topics. Educational visits play a vital role in enriching the World Around Us. These experiences provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to explore learning beyond the classroom, deepen their understanding of key topics, and make real-world connections.

Visits are carefully planned to support and enhance WAU topics across year groups. Examples of educational visits include:

Wee critters – exploring the topics of mini beasts and animals

Armagh Planetarium – developing understanding of space, science, and technology

Armagh Museum- exploring houses and homes from the past

Ulster Museum- dinosaur experience

Navan Centre- learning all about the Egyptians through a workshop

Holding History- World War Two visit

All educational visits are organised in accordance with the school's policy and the guidance outlined in Educational Visits: Policy, Practice and Procedures.

10. Health and Safety

We enable pupils to have access to the full range of World Around Us activities. Where children are to participate in activities outside the classroom, we carry out a Risk Assessment prior to the activity, to ensure it is safe and appropriate for all pupils.

There will always be elements of risk and uncertainty as children engage in active learning.

The NI Curriculum document states:

‘All activities must be taught within a safe environment and children must be made aware of safe practice always.’ (Page 84)

For WAU activities, we assess and manage risks with reference to the Health and Safety Policy.

11. WAU Coordinator Role and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the World Around Us co-ordinator to

- Negotiate, in accordance with the whole school Learning and Teaching policy, the place of WAU within the School Development Plan and be involved in Monitoring and Evaluating.
- Draw up an Action Plan for the development of the World Around Us in our school Monitor the implementation of the World Around Us Scheme to ensure continuity and progression throughout the school.
- Develop and disseminate knowledge and expertise of WAU in the context of the whole school policy on CPD.
- Advise and guide colleagues regarding appropriate classroom practice.
- Formulate policy/scheme of work in association with teachers and Principal, in line with SDP.
- Promote and disseminate the policy within school. Undertake monitoring to include lesson observations, examination of planning and carry out evaluations.
- Ensure that the area of learning is properly resourced in terms of acquisition, safe storage and access.
- Liaise with appropriate advisory services.

12. Monitoring and Review

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all teaching staff. Monitoring of the standards of children’s work and of the quality of teaching in Geography, History and Science and Technology within the World Around Us is the responsibility of the coordinator.

The work of the WAU co-ordinator also involves supporting colleagues in the teaching of this Learning Area, being informed about current developments and providing a strategic lead and direction. There is time allocated for fulfilling the vital task of reviewing planning, samples of children’s work and visiting classes to observe teaching in the subject

The WAU co-ordinator gives the Principal and/or the Board of Governors an annual update in which s/he evaluates the strengths and areas for improvement in this Learning Area.

13. Resources

We have developed resources for all WAU topics/themes in the school over the last three years through the Edina Science Grant. We keep some essential equipment and practical materials in a central store. Class teachers will supplement these resources with their own (and pupils') materials.

Class libraries and the main school library contain a supply of topic and reference books and the internet is also used to support children's individual research.

Stages	Learning Intentions (we are learning...)
Foundation Stage	To begin to have a sense of the world around them (BC) To become familiar with concepts such as fair/not fair, the past, my place (MI) To use our senses to find out about our world (TPD) To stop to look closely and carefully (MI) To use a magnifying glass, digital microscope (MI) To record independently in a variety of ways (MI) To make suggestions when planning what to do (BC) To use simple subject specific language (TPD) To begin to have a sense of the passage of time (MI) To be aware of how to find out about the past (TPD) That we can find out by exploring (BC) To begin to ask questions relevant to our explorations (BC) To recognise change in our own lives (MI)

Stages	Learning Intentions (we are learning...)
<p>Key Stage One</p>	<p><i>As for Foundation Stage and</i></p> <p>To begin to have a sense of how Geography, History, Science and Technology helps us to understand our world (MI)</p> <p>To begin to ask more focussed questions around our observations (BC)</p> <p>To make simple predictions and give reasons for these (TPD)</p> <p>To recognise and begin to explain why tests are fair/not fair (TPD)</p> <p>To classify according to simple differences (TPD)</p> <p>To recognise patterns in the natural and built environment eg Spring growth, house types etc. (MI)</p> <p>To interpret information from simple maps (MI)</p> <p>To begin to plan what to do (MI)</p> <p>To follow a structured enquiry (MI)</p> <p>That we may use all senses to explore and survey the natural and built environments (MI)</p> <p>To use standard measures when working (MI)</p> <p>That we can record work in a variety of ways (MI)</p> <p>To describe what happens and explain why (TPD)</p> <p>To relate what happened to what we predicted (TPD)</p> <p>To examine evidence and opinions from a range of sources (TPD)</p> <p>To record information using simple timelines (MI)</p> <p>To begin to understand what life was like for older people we know (BC)</p> <p>To be aware of how people's experiences may have influenced how they felt (BC)</p> <p>To identify how life in other time periods is similar to, or different from, the present day (TPD)</p> <p>To begin to identify why events happened in the past (TPD)</p>

Stages	Learning Intentions (we are learning...)
Key Stage Two	<p><i>As for Key Stage One and</i></p> <p>That History, Geography, Science and Technology help us to understand our world (MI)</p> <p>To use more precise subject specific language (TPD)</p> <p>To suggest subject specific questions using an enquiry-based approach (MI)</p> <p>To record and present information in appropriate formats (MI)</p> <p>To use different ways to find out about our world e.g. exploration, survey, fair test (BC)</p> <p>To make predictions based on previous knowledge (TPD)</p> <p>To design and carry out a fair test (TPD)</p> <p>To make observations noting close detail and to be able to use microscope (MI)</p> <p>To make observations taking account of the need for care and accuracy (SM)</p> <p>To make decisions about what, when and how to measure with increasing accuracy (TPD)</p> <p>To draw conclusions and make comparisons from our work (TPD)</p> <p>To sort and classify according to more complex similarities and differences, offering explanations (TPD)</p> <p>To begin to relate cause with effect (TPD)</p> <p>To structure a simple enquiry (TPD)</p> <p>To investigate an issue from different viewpoints (BC)</p> <p>To develop a sense of place through the use of maps, plans, photographs and atlases etc. (MI)</p> <p>To examine evidence and opinions from a range of sources and distinguish between fact and opinion (TPD)</p> <p>To order and sequence information to demonstrate understanding (TPD)</p> <p>To create timelines within a broad historical period (MI)</p> <p>To identify change and continuity within a period studied and suggest reasons (TPD)</p> <p>To appreciate that there may be different points of view/different causes and consequences of an event or situation (BC)</p>