



DEAN CLOSE
LITTLE TREES
NURSERIES

DEAN CLOSE NURSERIES LIMITED

Independent Day Nursery

Little Trees Curriculum in England (NL018A)

Dean Close Little Trees, Dean Close Nurseries Ltd is wholly owned by The Dean Close Foundation, registered Charity No: 1086829

DEAN CLOSE LITTLE TREES CURRICULUM

In England

A positive start to education is one of the most important gifts we can give children in our care. We believe that learning which is well-planned and delivered with enthusiasm and awareness helps children at all levels to acquire a love of discovery, investigation, learning and new experiences.

The Dean Close Foundation Vision

The Dean Close Foundation is an educational charity providing support and collaboration to a group of schools and nurseries. We provide ambitious and inspiring strategic collaboration and leadership with the aim of growing and deepening relationships between the family of schools and nurseries, offering outstanding care and education from the first months of life into adulthood.

Our Core Values

These core values are the pillars on which our schools and nurseries are built. We call them our Foundation Stones.

COURAGE

Everyone can show courage no matter how strong or weak they may feel. Our aim is to ensure that each person knows they are accepted for who they are, and in turn will be guided to show courage to try new things, take risks and impact positive change.

CONTRIBUTION

We know that each person has something valuable to offer. With a sense of humility, we aim to contribute greatly to each other and more widely beyond our immediate community.

FLOURISHING

Our desire is that our staff and children lead a full and fulfilled life, in which we flourish and reach our potential. Flourishing is the aim that anchors the values of love, courage, and contribution. We deeply care about quality in our teaching, high standards and inclusion and the desire not to leave anyone behind. By sincerely loving others, enabling people to feel confident to be courageous and encouraging wider contribution beyond oneself, we believe every member of our community can flourish.

LOVE

We encourage everyone within the Foundation to love each other with integrity, openness and abundance and we embrace vulnerability to enable depth in our love for others. We acknowledge that we have a wider responsibility to one another to be the best version of ourselves, through rest and reflection, to fully show love in this way. Our mission is that all people within our community will feel valued, respected, and loved.



At Little Trees Nurseries we strongly embrace our core values of courage, contribution, love, and flourishing, ensuring they are weaved into all our educational planning and are also just part of our day-to-day ethos.

Courage is demonstrated when we provide the opportunity for children to try new things, take risks and learn from their mistakes. Our staff encourage children to challenge themselves and to learn through discovery.

Contribution is demonstrated when we encourage children to come up with their own ideas and we provide them with the tools to extend their learning and exploration.

Love is demonstrated through our key worker system which enables children to feel safe and secure through the strong bonds that we form with them.

Our children **flourish** through our individualised planning, which is tailored to each child, based on what they know, their interests and how we are going to provide activities and experiences to develop them further through their next steps in their learning.

Skills for the Future; Enabling children to flourish.

COMPASSION

Teaching empathy, encouraging our children to show respect, care and understanding towards others and an ethical approach to work and civic responsibility.

COLLABORATION

Learning to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of other team members and to cooperate with one another, working together towards shared goals and employing the skills of each to enhance the success of the group.

CRITICAL THINKING

Developing problem-solving and analytical abilities, learning what makes a good argument and developing the capacity to make good decisions.

COMMUNICATION

Encouraging all children to practise articulating their ideas and sharing information in a variety of contexts.

CREATIVITY

Developing a mindset that looks for new and innovative approaches in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, the creative, expressive, and performing arts.



Early Years Theorists

We consider various early years theorists, including Montessori, Piaget, Steiner but feel that the Froebelian approach aligns itself to our principles and ethos in our nurseries.

Friedrich Froebel (1782 - 1852) was the inventor of kindergartens and a pioneer of early childhood education and care. Froebel's work and writing changed the way we think about and value early childhood. Froebel's ideas were considered revolutionary in the 1850s, but the principles of his work have since become part of modern, mainstream early years educational practice. <https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles>

The Froebelian Key Principles.

- Unity and Connectedness
- Creativity and the Power of Symbols
- The central importance of Play
- Engaging with Nature
- Autonomous Learners
- Knowledgeable, nurturing educators

“To learn a thing in life and through doing is much more developing, cultivating and strengthening than to learn it merely through the verbal communication of ideas.” Froebel

The Reggio Emilia approach is a child-centred and constructivist educational philosophy that focuses on a child's natural development and self-expression. The children learn through the hundred languages belonging to all humans and grow in alongside other. Children are seen as capable learners who are co-constructors of their learning as the approach uses self-directed, experiential learning in relationship driven environments.

“Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.” Loris Malaguzzi

Below is our Long-Term curriculum vision of what we want all children to experience, learn and develop during their time with Little Trees.

Our Long-Term Vision – A Froebelian Approach

We are very grateful to the Froebel Trust for their pamphlet 'Froebel's Principles and Practice Today'.

Aims	Inspiring	Learning	Achieving
Intent	<p>To inspire our children, parents, community, and staff to be the best they can be.</p> <p>To inspire children, parents, and staff to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable and Determined • Confident and Curious • Well-mannered and Collaborative • Independent and interdependent • Resilient but Open-minded • Responsible yet Compassionate • Courageous • Empowered learners 	<p>To enable all our children, parents, and staff to love learning.</p> <p>To provide a curriculum that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exciting and Innovative • Challenging but Inclusive • Creative yet Provocative • Ultimately Motivating <p>To be the nursery of choice for families and staff.</p> <p>To ensure that all our children, families and staff feel that they belong in Little Trees.</p>	<p>To empower all our children, parents, and staff to make progress and achieve.</p> <p>To provide support that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children and families will have success and feel successful in their learning and development and will be ready for the next stage in their life. • Families will be able to lead safe, fulfilling, and healthy lives. • Staff and children will work and play in a culture that engenders enquiry, reflection, self-awareness, and resilience.
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work together with consent and respect. • We put the child at the centre of everything, understanding that a child belongs to a family within the wider community. • We communicate with everyone in ways that are respectful, reciprocal, and mutually appropriate. <p>We value connectedness and belonging so:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child is assigned a key person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We invest in staff training and development so that all are knowledgeable and nurturing. • We provide opportunities for all to learn through self-activity and reflection. • We recognise the central importance of learning through play and creativity. • Everyone is given freedom with guidance. This means that there are choices from a range of options, and support and help are provided to ensure progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We start where the learner is. • We offer help, support, and guidance early. • We strive constantly to improve continuously. • We seek ways to empower others to increase resilience. • We recognise, welcome and respect diversity and difference. • We challenge prejudice and bias. • We support others to think for themselves, listening to and respecting their ideas.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every family is supported to engage and participate in their child's nursery development. • Every member of staff has a comprehensive development programme including support systems. • We seek to work in close partnership with members and groups within the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is encouraged and enabled to engage with nature through our 'Seize the Season' approach. • We provide resources that are provocative and challenging. • We give learners time to gain proficiency. • We provide exciting experiences and opportunities. • Provide the space for children to discover new passions and joy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We provide each learner with what they need now. • We support others to develop self-discipline. • We provide guidance to enable each child and adult to pursue and achieve their intentions, offering help when it is needed
<p>Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively supporting the children's confidence, self-esteem, resilience, and independence. Those leaving for primary school are ready for the next stage in their education. • Those leaving for primary school are ready for the next stage in their education. • High quality books and staff who are passionate about these books ensure that the children develop a love of stories. • A freedom with guidance approach to physical development results in children showing good control in both fine and gross motor movements appropriate for their stage of development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning journeys on Family make the learning and development visible for both parent and child. • The children use the 'Awe & Wonder' books to reflect on what they have done and to plan what they will do next. These books help the children to reflect on their learning and revisit their experiences. • Frequent and meaningful opportunities to use maths means that children have a confident, have-a-go, can-do attitude. • Our staff interaction and modelling teach the children the necessary personal, social, and emotional skills they need to succeed in life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children demonstrate very high levels of engagement and high levels of concentration for their stage of development. • Children consistently learn new vocabulary, including multilingual language or signs which enables them to communicate effectively. • Key People know their children very well. This deep knowledge enables them to ensure each child makes excellent progress from their individual starting points. It also enables them to have thoughtful conversations with children.

At Little Trees, our approach to teaching and learning includes:

- Trained, experienced Early Years Educators
- Lots of play-based learning which fosters children's individual interests.
- Indoor and outdoor learning time
- Plenty of opportunities for fun and experimentation
- Learning that is tailored to the needs of each child.
- Dedicated help provided wherever necessary.

Key Person Approach at Little Trees Nurseries

Every child is assigned a key person. That person will be based in the child's room when they start nursery and will get to know the child and family to offer support and guidance which is personal to them. The key person is calm, warm, and responsive and responds sensitively to each child's needs, feelings, ideas, and behaviours.

Why the Key Person is important to each child?

- I know there is someone in nursery who knows and cares about me.
- I feel happy, safe, and ready to play and learn.
- I want to explore and investigate, knowing someone is there to offer comfort and support.
- I will try new things even if I am not sure, because I know it's ok to make mistakes.
- I feel like I belong in nursery and have people and things around me that I care about.
- I know there is someone at nursery who will greet me when I arrive and make me feel welcome and secure.
- If something happens during my day that upsets me, I know I will have someone that will comfort me.

The Key Person.

- Hears and respects children's voices.
- Values children's thoughts and opinions.

High Quality Learning

Our aim is to provide the best possible learning environment for every child who attends a Dean Close Little Trees Nursery.

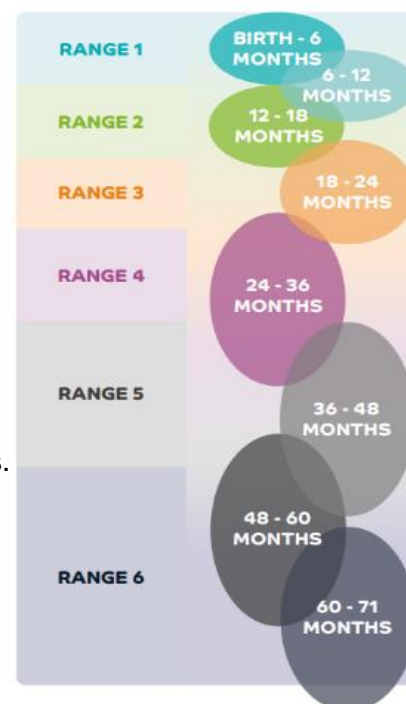
Birth to 5 Matters is non statutory guidance for Early Years to meet the needs of children and lay strong foundations for their futures.

The guidance reaffirms core principles which recognise:

- The child at the centre of the practice.
- The child's connections within family, communities, cultures, and the natural world
- The need to consider the whole child: physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, health, and learning.

- The child's rights as members of society under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNRC).
- Statutory requirements of the SEND Code of Practice.

Birth to 5 Matters put the child at the core of our practice, celebrating each child's uniqueness and giving them a voice. It recognises the child's connections within their family, community and culture and the need to consider the whole child: physical, social and emotional wellbeing, health, and learning. There is a focus on effective pedagogy and keeps the cycle of observation, assessment and planning central for each child, supporting their interests, whilst bearing in mind the need to introduce children to new ideas and knowledge. It includes 6 ages. ranges, based how children develop and learn at their own rate and in their own ways.



There are seven areas of learning and development within the Birth to 5 Matters framework.

Areas of Learning and Development	Birth to 5 Matters Aspects
Prime Areas	
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	Making Relationships
	Sense of Self
	Understanding Feelings
Physical Development	Moving and handling
	Health and Self-care
Communication and Language	Listening and Attention
	Understanding
	Speaking
Specific Areas	
Literacy	Reading
	Writing
Mathematics	Mathematics
Understanding the World	People and Communities
	The World
	Technology
Expressive Arts and Design	Creating with Materials
	Being Imaginative and Expressive

Our Long-Term Curriculum

Our intent is for children to leave us confident in -	Implementation - How we will support children.
<p>Knowing about themselves and others, and how to keep safe <i>PSED / CL / PD / UW</i></p> <p>Having the social skills and confidence to play alongside and with other children. <i>PSED / CL / UW</i></p> <p>Being able to make a simple choice. <i>CL</i></p> <p>Having a go and keep on trying. <i>PSED / PD/ L / M</i></p> <p>Listening and taking turns <i>CL/ PSED / M</i></p> <p>Following simple instructions <i>CL</i></p> <p>Knowing several songs and rhymes and enjoy joining in with singing. <i>L / M / EAD / CL / PSED</i></p> <p>Sitting at a table for snack and mealtimes <i>PSED/ UW/ PD</i></p> <p>Talking to an adult <i>CL / PSED / UW</i></p> <p>Using gross and fine motor skills to do things independently. <i>PD / PSED</i></p> <p>Using mathematical concepts and language in play and everyday experiences. <i>M / CL</i></p>	<p>Observe children at play and plan activities that follow their interests and introduce them to new ideas and concepts.</p> <p>Being specific with our praise, noting how well children solve problems, have ideas, and negotiate.</p> <p>Use additional funding to support children as identified.</p> <p>Work with parents to ensure they can support their child's learning at home.</p> <p>Share and discuss experiences.</p> <p>Role model positive language and positive behaviour</p> <p>Provide supervised opportunities for turn taking.</p> <p>Provide real life experiences.</p> <p>Use visual aids for children who might need support to communicate and or to aid transition from one activity to another.</p> <p>Well planned leaning environments indoors and outdoors that promote the focus on learning.</p> <p>Know and understand the areas of learning and development.</p> <p>By building a good relationship up with both key children and their immediate family</p> <p>Know how each child plays and learns.</p>

7 Areas of Learning key

**PD – Physical Development
Personal, Social & Emotional Development**

CL – Communication & Language

PSED –

L – Literacy

M – Mathematics

UW – Understanding of the World

EAD – Expressive Arts & Design

Impact

We believe that through the above intentions for children, that they will develop a love for learning and go on to be ready for their next stage in their educational journey with the skills, confidence, and resilience as they transition to school.

Our aim is for the children to have:

- Strong social skills
- Be independent in their own personal care.
- Have a curiosity about the world and a desire to learn.
- Express their own thoughts with others, listening and asking questions.

There is a focus on individualised planning for each child, focusing on their interests and from our observations. Highly effective staff, know the children well and how to engage them in their learning.

We observe what the children can do, sharing these with parents to gain a holistic view of the child. Our planning is flexible, as a child's interests may take their learning in a different direction, but we have an overall view of what we want our children to learn within their educational journey with us.

We complete individual next steps in learning for each child from our observations and these inform the planning which could be different for each child, alongside of course the continuous provision.

Role of the Adult

Our qualified educators and skilled assistants manage learning by:

- Promoting self-confidence and self-esteem for every child.
- Responding positively to learning needs and styles.
- Encouraging friendship, teamwork and embracing diversity.
- Develop communication skills, including with singing and storytelling.
- Balancing adult-led opportunities and child-led play.
- Using the best resources and techniques for each child.
- Keeping up to date with best practice.
- Encourage children's curiosity and questions.
- Support children to solve their own problems.
- Help children to reflect and extend their thinking.

Our Early Years Educators and Assistants work alongside our children by becoming members of their learning group. Rather than be the one to guide the learning, they follow the interests and engagements of the children. They can be used as a resource, but also as a support and guide to help them extend their thinking. As facilitators, our staff help children to consider alternative approaches and assist them as they problem-solve through the challenging phases of their investigations.

Enabling Environment

We have wonderful, spacious indoor and outdoor learning areas where children can explore in a safe, supervised manner whilst providing risk and challenge.

Our large and spacious gardens offer wonderful outdoor play facilities that introduce children to the wonder and beauty of nature.

We encourage children to work and play together but respect the need for peace and privacy when appropriate. Our children are helped to manage conflict or challenging situations in a positive and pro-active way, listening to others and finding ways to work together.

Our environment is seen as the 'third teacher.' Knowing the capabilities of our children, our environment is set up for them to independently follow their interests, select materials, and engage in meaningful and intentional ways. The setting promotes relationships,

communication, collaboration, and exploration through play. Through purposeful choice of materials, the environment promotes creativity, thinking, problem-solving, and risk-taking through open-ended provocations.

Engaging Experiences

Our qualified educators and skilled assistants provide and offer engaging experiences and provocations by:

- building on babies and young children's natural curiosity to explore.
- supporting babies and young children's early language development.
- enabling babies and young children to develop their physical, social, and emotional skills.
- broaden and deepen babies and young children's thinking and understanding.
- supporting creative thinking, problem solving and imagination.
- develop a sense of belonging for all babies and young children.

Play provides an optimal learning environment as it is engaging, interactive, and social.

Over time we offer a range of experiences to support the children's knowledge and skills development. Some of these include:

- Planting seeds watching them grow and eating what has been grown.
- Meeting people from the local community who help us such as the dentist and police.
- Visiting local care home
- Trips to local parks and walks around the local area.
- Raising money for charities
- Baking activities.

We will celebrate a range of festivals and share special occasions with the children throughout the year. Some of these include:

- Shared meals and food tasting
- Dressing up
- Dancing to music
- Books and stories
- Visitors
- Making cards.

The Benefits of Outdoor Play

Why is outdoor learning so important?

At Little Trees, children have long uninterrupted periods of time when they can play both inside and out. The Department for Health recommends that young children, who can walk unaided, are physically active for a minimum of three hours each day, whilst Development Matters recommends children are outside for a minimum of 45 minutes daily. This physical activity is indoors and outdoors and includes tasks such as walking and standing up.

However, we know that children are generally more physically active when outside and so our outdoor provision provides opportunities for children to move freely.

Being physically active:

- Promotes positive well-being.
- Develops the muscles needed for writing.
- Stimulates the eye muscles needed to follow text during reading.
- Helps children to learn how to play with others; to form friendships by cooperating, negotiating, and trying out their own and other's ideas.
- Improves the function of heart, lungs, and blood circulation which in turn promotes good health.
- Stimulates children to communicate both non-verbally and verbally; children are far more likely to talk outside than inside.
- Gives children the opportunity to understand concepts with their whole bodies in a more abstract way, such as many of the ideas we use in Maths, like weight and size.
- Brings the brain to just the right state for taking in and processing new experiences.
- Creates learning and memory.

Being still and sitting still are very complex and advanced skills which young children develop over time. Being able to keep your body still requires well developed balance and finely controlled muscles. Both are gained from moving rather than practising stillness. Children who find it difficult to sit still for developmentally appropriate amounts of time need to move more. The expectation is that preschool children can sit for periods of 5-10 minutes at any one time. We do this through high quality, engaging circle times for stories, reflecting sessions and focused tasks.

Engaging with nature:

- Better use of all the senses to notice and comment on details in the natural world.
- Use of the imagination and creativity to make up games which are open ended by using what is naturally available to them, not being dependent on toys or screens. Children are more likely to demonstrate higher level learning when engaging with nature in this way.
- Research shows that there is a greater use of language and spontaneous learning opportunities and experiences.
- Children engaging with nature are often still, reflective, observant, and co-operative.
- Children learn to make use of what is already there with the ideas being all their own. This is both empowering and leads to better mental health. They learn to be respectful of their environment.
- Engaging with nature involves children making their own choices, allowing them freedom with guidance.
- Through gardening experiences, children experience life cycles, growth and decay and learn how to care for and respect living things.

What do we provide outdoors?

- Plentiful space so that children can move freely without obstruction.

- A variety of different surfaces for children to move on. Different surfaces and levels make different demands on a child's muscles and posture.
- Opportunities for children to go up and down so children can learn about gravity.
- Large vertical and horizontal surfaces for children to work on in an energetic, whole-bodied way, such as painting on a large expanse of wall or floor.
- Places and materials for digging and filling, providing physical workouts for lungs, circulation, bones, muscles, ligaments, and tendons.
- Lots of things to lift, carry and transport. Outdoors children can work on a larger scale which makes greater demands on their physical activity and development.
- Wheeled vehicles: playing with them involves pushing and pulling with legs, arms, back and shoulders. Children must use both sides of their body alternately which helps develop both sides of their brains, necessary for hand-eye co-ordination, reading and writing. Moving fast and turning corners develops children's posture and balance.
- Dance, music, rhymes, and games: these support physical development, social and emotional development as well as communication.
- Calm places so that children can rest and recover. Children go from high levels of energy to sudden exhaustion, calm and rest are essential for their well-being and health.

What do the adults do outside?

- Join in, model active play and dress appropriately for physical activity. Noticing and commenting when we are cold and discovering how we can warm up, or how we have become hot from moving around.
- Encourage, support, and engage children in physical activity through action and verbal and non-verbal communication. Communicating about physical activity, using movement vocabulary, asking questions, and responding to children's answers and ideas.
- Allow children to play with mud and sticks, and to get dirty.
- Allow children to climb trees and to build dens.
- Grow fruit and vegetables with the children and either use them in recipes or sell them on, using the proceeds to purchase further seeds and bulbs, beginning the process again.
- Encourage children to look closely at mini-beasts, flowers, and plants, treating them with respect, understanding and witnessing first-hand the life cycle of plants and animals.

Heuristic play/treasure baskets for babies and toddlers

Heuristic play is rooted in stimulating children's natural curiosity. Everyday objects are used for children to explore, discover, and investigate. This type of play is when babies and young children interact with everyday objects, rather than toys. The aim is to provide a wide range of sensory stimulation to help children to discover and learn things for themselves. When children make an enjoyable discovery, they will repeat this action several times to test the result, which strengthens their cognitive development as well as fine muscle control and hand/eye coordination.

Heuristic play by its very nature is open ended as there is no fixed or required way of using the objects presented, but instead there are many possibilities.

The role of the staff is simply to observe how the children interact with the materials. What are the children interested in? How are they using the items? What are their favourite objects? Are the children losing interest, in which case it is best to encourage them to tidy away and move onto other activities.

Block Play

Block play is an integral part of the activities that we provide for our children and has many benefits. It offers open-ended and creative learning experiences, giving the children freedom to explore, take apart and put back together any block-based creation they can think of. When children play with blocks, they are practising mathematical skills. In selecting blocks of different sizes, they begin to see mathematical relationships and learn about gravity, weight, and balance. Block play requires perseverance, problem solving skills, reflection, modification of ideas and learning from mistakes. All these are valuable skills in their development.

The role of the adult in block play;

Our staff will interact sensitively by carefully observing and tuning into the child's intentions, actively listening, showing interest, and respecting the children's constructions.

They will factor in extended periods of uninterrupted time, so play is not disrupted and allow children to have free open access to blocks to enable them to choose and select freely. We will role model language and a narrative where appropriate to introduce new language and mathematical concepts.

'Rich block play does not just occur. It develops when the adult acts as a powerful catalyst working hard to enable it.' (Bruce, in Gura 1992:26)

Malleable play

Malleable play helps children to develop their fine motor skills, which in turn strengthen the muscles in fingers and hands, which are necessary to develop skills in early writing/mark making.

We provide children with a range of different materials that can easily be manipulated either with hands or tools.

These include:

- Playdough
- Sand
- Cornflour gloop
- Clay
- Soap flakes and water
- Mud.

Other learning experiences from malleable play includes:

- Language acquisition when describing the feel of the materials, such as 'stretchy,' 'squashy,' etc.
- Understanding that materials can be changed, for example by adding water.
- Exploring solid and flat shapes, patterns, texture, and colour
- Developing imagination and creativity

- Understanding that one object or material can be used to represent another.

Loose parts

Loose parts are natural or man-made objects or materials which provide children with endless opportunities to build into their play. It is open ended, so children can use it in many ways. It encourages children to use their imagination and be creative. It develops skills such as collaboration, shared thinking, problem solving and decision making.

Examples of loose part include:

Natural	Man Made
Wood slices	Different types of material
Sticks	Shower curtains
Stones	Crates
Pebbles	Tarpaulin
Sand	Cable drums and reels
Mud	Cardboard boxes and tubes
Bark chips	Curtain rings
Grass	Lids
Leaves	Cotton reels
Flowers/weeds	Guttering
Feathers	Hose pipes
Seaweed	Nets
	Old suitcase
	Bubble wrap

Our staff role within this play is:

- Wait to be invited into the play.
- Only organise when children want the support.
- Enable play to occur uninterrupted.
- Leave the children to develop skills at their own pace.
- Leave the content and intent of play to the children.
- Enable children to decide what is appropriate behaviour within safe limits.

Movement, song, rhythm, and rhyme

Listening to, and joining in with songs and rhymes is all part of the process of learning to read. Children need to hear the way that words flow, how some may sound the same and to play with words.

Singing songs and rhymes form a large part of the everyday routine in our nurseries. We know that children who have good rhyming skills, develop well when they start to learn to read. Many of the songs we sing with the children, are accompanied by actions, such as clapping, foot stamping, which develops an awareness of tempo and beat.

When we share familiar rhymes, many other areas of learning are included, such as mathematics, through counting in songs such as '5 little ducks,' to physical development in songs such as 'row, row, the boat.'

Early Reading at Little Trees

The first thing a child is likely to 'read' is their name as that is a very important part of themselves. Later, there will be a connection about how letters represent a sound and that putting letters together creates words.

Writing doesn't just appear in books of course. As adults we are reading throughout the day without even thinking about it. Signs and labels, instructions, road names, text messages, menus... the list is endless. We introduce these to the children in nursery as part of their play (having a menu in a cafe for example). We look at how words are read left to right and from top to bottom. Whilst reading we may track the words with our fingers or look at particular words and the way they're written large words often mean you say them loudly!

It is just as important to talk about the pictures in a book as it is to look at the writing. Being able to talk about what might be happening, what the characters may be saying to each other or wondering about what might happen next. The pictures often give us a clue as to what the writing may say.

We have 'core books' that we read frequently throughout the year in order that the children come to know them very well. These books can be re visited again and again on different levels to support language development. We also tell these stories in different ways, such as using props or actions to fit with the topic the children are engaged within.

As always, we start with what the children are interested in. As well as reading factual and fiction books, we also tell our own stories, and the children are encouraged to make up and act out their own. We look for, and comment on, print in our environment and beyond. The children are encouraged and supported to use small characters or puppets to act out a story, often they will improvise using anything to hand. Singing is a big part of the day, and we often make up songs on the spot with the children. Above all we make it fun for the children so that they are motivated to find out more about words and books and grow up with a love of reading.

Early Writing at Little Trees

Children need to develop various physical skills and specific muscles before we expect them to 'write.' Writing is a sensory as well as a physical experience. Before they can control a pencil, they need to be able to control their body. Children are given opportunities to climb, push, pull, swing, and use a range of different tools. Children develop the muscles in their hands, wrists, and fingers in a variety of ways: manipulating playdough, threading, singing finger songs and rhymes, using tools such as scissors or a knife to prepare snack.

Children will experiment with making marks before giving them a meaning. They may use paint and water on a fence in the garden, chalk on the ground to make circles to jump in or use a stick in the mud. These marks will gradually mean something, and children will realise that writing is all around us – in books, on signs, on the register, on electronic devices.

As with anything we do, we need to have a reason to want to do it. The first thing children are likely to be interested in is writing their own name, particularly that magical initial letter! They may write an order in a role play café, write down a story they have made up, name something they have made so that they can take it home or give a message to someone. They will see adults writing in the nursery and talking about what they are doing and why.

We value everything that a child produces, from the very first marks which they proudly show us. Writing is demonstrated throughout the day, so that is seen as having a purpose. Name cards are used throughout the setting and are easily accessible for children to refer to when

needed. We don't offer tracing over letters as children won't necessarily learn to form letters correctly that way. Children are encouraged to hold a pencil in a way that is comfortable and effective. Clipboards, notebooks, white boards, felt pens, chalks and pencils are everywhere at nursery!

Children develop hand dominance/preference between the ages of 2 and 4 years of age. The dominant hand and the non-dominant hand play a significant role in completing many tasks and activities. Both hands working together is known as bilateral coordination. Some children are good at using both hands (ambidextrous), but it is much better for a child to develop strength and dexterity in one hand. This will help them to develop accuracy and speed with fine motor tasks, particularly handwriting. We offer children plenty of everyday opportunities to participate in developing their hand skills. We encourage activities that required continued use of one hand without direction as to which hand to use and provide resources such as writing aids and left-handed scissors for children who are clearly using their left hand as their dominant hand.

Early Mathematical skills at Little Trees

We begin with what the children know already, often how old they are: a very important number! We encourage children to notice what is different and later, what is the same, as these are sound foundations for mathematical learning. We sing number rhymes and action songs with numbers to help children learn number names and encourage them to share number songs that they sing at home.

Counting and quantities; Once children are aware of numbers, we help them to understand that numbers represent a quantity. We teach them to count using one number for each object and that the last number represents the total quantity. We encourage children that everything can be counted from jumps and hops in the garden to pieces of fruit at snack time or the stairs to the nappy changing unit. We point out numbers all around us e.g. on road signs and on the clock.

Exploring shape and measures; Children use a range of construction toys and blocks to explore 2D and 3D shapes, learning practically what different shapes look and feel like. Cooking and following recipes offer opportunities to measure quantities. Children have access to timers and tape measures to use in their own play which might lead to them comparing different lengths and heights.

We use every opportunity to include Maths in activities, such as counting out the cutlery, glasses and plates for lunchtime or putting wellies into pairs when we tidy up. We also make sure that we take Maths to the children: when an observation shows that they need help with a concept, we will plan activities to support this. We also use our observations to extend and challenge children who are already very confident with Maths.

Schema's

Schemas allow children to explore and express developing ideas and thoughts through their play and exploration.

'A schema is a pattern of repeated actions. Clusters of schemas develop into later concepts.' (Athey, 2007)

There are times when a child is observed doing the same thing repeatedly, such as emptying contents on the floor, rolling wheels and toys, climbing into and under things which can seem odd to the unskilled practitioner. This play is a schema and understanding the importance of the repetitive play which supports the child's brain development, it is the child's way to develop their understanding of the world around them and themselves. Schemas can support children to express their developing ideas, build concepts and thoughts through their exploratory play. The repetitive actions of schematic play allow children to construct meaning in what they are doing.

There are various types of schemas and schematic play. Often, our observations may refer to schematic play which can support and inform future learning opportunities for the child.

Many of these repeated behaviours are indeed testing out mathematical and scientific concepts, as children use objects and materials in their play. Children may show a fascination for one, some or all the schemas. The most common types of schemas seen in children's play and exploration are.

- **Trajectory** – This involves exploring height, speed, distance and how things move (horizontally, vertically, and diagonally) and how children can affect that movement. For example, repeatedly dropping a drink cup from their highchair, or throwing objects.
- **Rotation** – This involves exploring shape, space, spatial awareness, movement, and rotation, including how children turn themselves around, and how objects spin and bounce. For example, very carefully observing and studying the movement of wheels on car toys.
- **Enclosing** – This involves exploring the properties of size, shape, measurement, and volume of spaces through creating and/or occupying enclosed spaces. For example, having a fascination of hiding objects in shape sorters, cupboards, and boxes.
- **Enveloping** – This involves exploring space, volume, capacity, weight, spatial awareness, and size through covering or wrapping objects or themselves completely. Children may also fill bags, baskets, or containers. For example, climbing into objects such as dog beds, role play cots/ kitchens etc.
- **Transporting** – This involves exploring quantities through moving objects, a collection of objects or themselves from one place to another. For example, repeatedly moving objects around the room in handbags, dolls prams or trolleys.
- **Connecting and disconnecting** – This involves exploring size, shape, and estimation through joining things together and taking them apart. For example, building bricks, Lego, train tracks.
- **Positioning** – This involves exploring ordering, sequencing and classification through placing and arranging objects in patterns or rows. For example, lining up all their teddies, animals in a row.

Children's schematic play may change over time, as children explore individual schemas and then combine them in more complex play as their concepts build and adapt.

ASSESSMENTS

All assessment, including observations, plays a fundamental role to enable educators to support children to make progress at a pace that is appropriate to them, ensuring they are supported and challenged accordingly. It contributes to developing a holistic picture of the child; what their strengths are, how do they learn, what engages them, fascinates them, and inspires them to think creatively which in turn informs the next steps in learning and teaching.

Little Trees have chosen to adopt the Birth to 5 Matters guidance as an assessment tool when making our observations on development.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/>

How do we Assess Learning and Plan for What's Next?

In planning for children, we consider the different ways in which children learn. The three characteristics of effective learning are.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring

ENGAGEMENT
Finding out and exploring
Playing with what they know
Being willing to 'have a go'

Active Learning

MOTIVATION
Being involved and concentrating
Keep trying
Enjoying achieving what they set out to do

Creative and Critical Thinking

THINKING
Having their own ideas
Making links
Working with ideas

Quality observations plays a key role in our practice and what we offer children. Observations are grounded in our thorough knowledge of child development, and the child is at the centre of the process. This helps us to find out what motivates, interests, and engages children as well as understanding their levels of engagement, their emotional states, their friendships, skills, and competencies. Effective observation enables us to reflect on what we see and hear from the child, and to respond in ways that will help them to make continued

progress. Observations take many forms in the nurseries and are used to inform current and future planning.



Observation, support and extending play and learning.

Our skilled staff interact with children in a way which supports their learning and to inform interactions and subsequent planning. Observing is more than just watching, it is listening carefully, noting what the children are interested in.

'Unless we know, tune into and understand our children, unless we act effectively on what we know, we cannot help them very much' (Bruce et al. 2015xii)

When we observe and support the children, we can then extend their play by providing physical materials, giving the children time to explore, introduce new language and support with understanding new concepts and ideas.

Children are naturally curious about the world around them and our staff not only provide a stimulating environment for the children to explore but encourage the children to have an enquiring mind and use open ended questioning to find out what they know, reflect on prior learning, and invite speculation and consideration.

It's important that we know how each child is progressing, and that we share that progress with parents.

We begin by talking to, listening to, and interacting with each child. This gives us a point from which all future observations and assessments can be made. When a child joins our nursery, parents are asked to complete their own assessment form (Individual Development Overview) to indicate the nursery's starting point in their development. Using this information, and that of our own observations and from spending time getting to know every child, the key person will write their first summative assessment, usually within the first 4-6 weeks.

Our assessments are carried out without interrupting the way children work and play. Mostly observational, we look for ways in which each child has progressed, the characteristics of effective learning, child's interests as well as areas in which we think they may need more support.

Our observations and assessments are written to the child, as if writing them a letter, celebrating, and offering praise and encouragement at their achievements.

When looking at a child's progress, we always remember that every child is different and that learning progression in the early stages of development varies hugely from one child to the next. So, all our assessments are based purely on what we think is best for each individual child.

If it is identified that a child would benefit from extra support, or has additional needs, please refer to our NL008 Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs Policy.

We keep parents up to date on their child's progress termly through a Summative Assessment Report written at the end of each term, and we can answer any questions they may have at any time. When it's time for a child to leave us and start primary school, we share our final assessment with the new school, and parents, to help them with their own learning preparation.

How Often are Children Assessed?

- Individual Development Overview = Parental assessment on child's development upon starting Nursery.
- Observations = Quick meaningful wow moments as and when, typically one a week.
- Snapshot observation = Time focused, one per half term/ two per term.

- Termly assessment = Summary of all assessments within the term, and identifies 'What's Next', once per term. The 2-year check will replace the termly assessment as required.
- School Leaver's report in the last term before transitioning to primary school.

Regular Assessment helps with.

- Early identification of children who may need temporary extra help, and children who may have special educational needs.
- Checking that every child, and groups of children, are making progress and taking prompt action where this is not the case.
- Reporting formally and involving parents in their child's learning, including in the statutory 2-year-old progress check required in England.
- Celebrate children's achievements with parents and share focus for learning.
- Discussions with other professionals who may be involved with a child and family. For example, a health visitor, speech and language therapist or social care worker
- Sharing information with receiving schools in the Summer Term so that children can continue their learning journey through to school as seamlessly as possible.

Summative assessments

Summative assessment provides a holistic summary of a child's progress, strengths, needs, interests, how the child learns and how the child is supported.

Each term we complete these assessments to ensure that the children are making progress and support measures put in place to ensure all children are encouraged to reach their full potential.

How can Parents help?

Each child has the best start when we all work together to help and support them. We welcome all the support and involvement parents and families can give, both when the family first bring their child to our nursery and during their time here. Parents have access to their child's Family account and are encouraged to upload their own observations on their child's development. Family is the software system used at the nursery to record all activities of every child, to which all parents have access so that they can see what their individual child is doing and achieving each day.

There is no expectation that parents need to learn how the assessment framework is used, as the key person will support with this. However, through encouragement of parents, the key person will have a much rounder view of each child's development not only in the nursery but at home too, which will strengthen and secure the assessments made on a termly basis.

Talking to their child about their day, sharing books with them, attending any parent/nursery meetings, and getting involved in the life of the nursery are just some of the ways parents can have a positive influence at this important learning and development stage.

Evaluation

We will check that our curriculum is meeting the needs of our children by.

- Gathering feedback from the children, parents, and other professionals.
- Review the progress children are making and how they are accessing the learning environment.
- As a team discuss our observations of the educational programmes we offer.
- Individually with the manager of the setting discuss the curriculum.
- Reflection on what we offer, do, and provide for children.
- Self-evaluate regularly and look for ways to continually improve.

Keeping our standards high.

Our staff are trained, experienced practitioners and support staff who are experts in early years learning. We regularly send staff for additional training or manage training at the nursery to make sure every child benefit from the latest understanding and teaching techniques.

Our staff have regular personal assessments and are observed while working with the children so that we can be confident that they are effective in both their teaching and their attitude. Everyone on the staff team is encouraged to bring new ideas and improvements to the nursery, so that we are constantly improving the way we work with every child.

Famly Child Development updates

We encourage parents to be involved in their child's development in nursery. Parents can expect to receive the observations and assessments undertaken on their child through the Famly app, detailed above in 'how often are children assessed'.

As well as personalised updates on child development, parents can expect to receive a weekly overview of the activities and experiences offered in their child's department through the newsfeed. Updates will include social events happening in the nursery, including ideas and information on how to support children's learning further at home.

Explorers and Adventurers children will also have their daily diaries uploaded to Famly, which includes timings of naps, toileting/nappies, food etc.

All children will be signed in and out on Famly, however please note, this is not the time the child arrives or leaves the nursery that day. The nursery maintains paper registers for this in the event of any emergency, to ensure no internet failure impacts on our records of children in attendance.

Appendix

1. Early Years Foundation Stage - [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework - January 2024](#)
2. Birth to 5 Matters - [Birth to 5 Assessment Framework](#)
3. NL008B – Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs - [DCNL SEND Policy](#)

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