Rookery School

Early Years policy

Approved by Full Board of Trustees	Date September 2026
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1. Aims

This policy aims to ensure:

- That children access a broad and balanced curriculum that gives them the broad range of knowledge and skills needed for good progress through school and life
- Quality and consistency in teaching and learning so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind
- Close partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers
- Every child is included and supported through equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice

2. Legislation

This policy is based on requirements set out in the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers September 2026

3. Structure of the EYFS

The Early Years setting at Rookery School consists of two reception classes and a part time nursery. The nursery part time provision consists of a three hour morning session and a three hour afternoon session.

4. Curriculum

Rookery School EYFS Curriculum – Intent, Implementation and Impact

Intent: Why do we teach what we teach?

At Rookery School we place great value on the development of children as individuals and providing them with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to prepare them for the challenges in Key Stage One and beyond. Our aim in the EYFS is to build strong foundations rooted in academic success as well as moral and spiritual development, so that ultimately our pupils can be successful, go on to be active citizens of society and happy, curious life-long learners.

Our curriculum is therefore the cultural capital that we believe our children need to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that will support them to thrive and succeed. We recognise that this is built through rich experiences, meaningful interactions and opportunities to learn through play.

Alongside the seven areas of learning and development, we intentionally foster the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning: **Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, and Creating and Thinking Critically**. These characteristics support children to develop positive dispositions towards learning, become increasingly independent and resilient, and make connections between their experiences, knowledge and understanding. Through purposeful play, exploration and adult interaction, children are encouraged to develop the habits and attitudes that will underpin their future learning.

We teach them how to listen, speak and meet the high expectations for behaviour by working together and being kind. As such, we prioritise personal, social and emotional development and communication and language in the Early Years Setting. Our enabling environment and warm, skillful adult interactions support the children as they begin to link learning to their play and exploration.

We invest time and energy in supporting children to set and reflect on their own goals, encouraging them to aim high and develop a lifelong love of reading, writing and mathematics. Our holistic curriculum provides rich opportunities for meaningful connections across the areas of learning, enabling children to apply and deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding through purposeful, engaging experiences.

At the heart of our approach is the unique child. We provide extended periods of uninterrupted play and sustained thinking, allowing children to follow their interests, develop their ideas and become increasingly independent, curious and confident learners. We value imagination, creativity and exploration, creating a sense of enjoyment, awe and fascination through vibrant continuous indoor and outdoor provision, educational visits and regular Forest School experiences.

We are committed to providing high-quality teaching across the curriculum. Our investment in specialist teaching in art and physical development further enriches children's experiences, ensuring that they have regular opportunities to develop their creativity, physical competence and wider skills through expert guidance and purposeful practice.

Implementation: How do we teach what we teach?

Pupils learn through a balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities. The timetable is carefully structured so that children have rigorous directed teaching of phonics. Children follow the rigorous and highly successful Little Wandle program faithfully so that they meet the age appropriate expectations for reading. For maths foundational knowledge the children follow Mastery in Number in addition to adult led focused teaching emphasing key skills of number, calculation and shape so that pupils develop deep understanding and the acquisition of mathematical language. Pupils learn through games and tasks using concrete manipulatives which are then rehearsed and applied to their own learning during exploration. Pupils begin to develop these key skills during daily maths sessions where they explore sorting, quantities, shape, number and counting awareness. These early mathematical experiences are carefully designed to help pupils remember the content they have been taught and to support them with integrating their new knowledge across the breadth of their experiences and into larger concepts. There are rigorous assessments to ensure the foundational skills are embedded

Family group sessions focus on essential communication and language acquisition and PSED.

Adult led sessions are followed by group work where children work with a member of staff or independently to learn & practise their foundational skills. This focused group time means the teacher can systematically check for understanding, identify and respond to misconceptions quickly and provide real-time verbal feedback which results in a strong impact on the acquisition of new learning.

Children are provided with plenty of time to engage in 'exploration' throughout the variety of experiences carefully planned to engage and challenge them in the provision. The curriculum is planned for the inside and outdoors and equal importance is given to learning in both areas. The curriculum is planned in a cross-curricular way to enable all aspects of the children's development including understanding the world and expressive art and design as well as to promote sustained thinking and active learning. Intellectual preparation and co-planning is led by the Early Years Leader every week with short 15 minute 'child-led' planning sessions happening three times a week. During these sessions the teachers reflect on three questions: "What foundational knowledge do our focus individuals need to learn? What embedded learning have we observed in this area where the children are practicing taught skills independently? What can be changed to exploit the learning and interests of the children/individuals in this area?" In this way, we ensure that the children contribute to their environment and that the provision leads to depth of learning across the curriculum.

Reading is at the heart of our curriculum. We promote and celebrate the love of reading in every aspect of learning. We have a clear reading spine and many additional texts during out Talk Through Story sessions and books that are shared with the children depending on how they lead the learning.

Our inclusive approach means that all children learn together but we have a range of additional interventions and support to enhance and scaffold children who may not be reaching their potential or moving on children who are exceeding national expectations. Children develop appropriate knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning, relevant to their age and stage of development. Children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being typically achieve well from their starting points. This means that they are generally ready for the next stage of learning. The characteristics

of effective learning are viewed as an integral part of all areas of learning and are reflected in our observations of children.

Our regular monitoring of teaching and learning includes coaching and constructive feedback to develop a good subject knowledge and ensure effective quality first teaching. We tailor our staff CPD to be early years specific and are focused on moderating outcomes across the phase so that every member of our team feels confident in making accurate judgements about where individual pupils are and their next steps for learning.

Impact: How do we know what pupils have learnt and how well they have learnt it?

Our curriculum needs to meet the needs of our children, including our disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, so we spend time looking at and evaluating how children are learning. This is achieved through talking to children, looking at their work, observing their learning experiences and analysing data and progress by year group, class, groups and individuals. Every member of staff uses ongoing observational assessment to identify children's starting points and plan experiences which ensure progress. This information is tracked using Sonar and Foundational Skills Checkpoints which enables us to measure our starting points against a national data set. We use this information on a weekly basis to plan learning experiences and next steps so that knowledge and skills are built cumulatively. During each assessment window, four times a year, teachers update the progress children have made onto Sonar which allows us to assess the impact of teaching and evaluate whether it has been enough. Evidence of children's learning including observations, work samples, photographs and contributions from parents are recorded on SeeSaw which children use to reflect on their progress through pupil voice.

During their time in our EYFS, children make rapid progress so that they meet the national expectation for GLD at the end of the year. Pupils also make good progress toward their age-related expectations before transitioning into Year One. We believe our high standards are due to the enriched play-based exploration alongside the rigour of assessment and teaching the children have as they move through the early years – a rich diet of balanced learning experiences and language is undoubtedly the best way to develop happy, curious children.

The Early Years provision at Rookery School ensures that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning that gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.

Our early years setting follows the curriculum as outlined in the 2025 statutory framework of the EYFS.

There are four guiding principles that shape our practice in early years at Rookery School.

These are:

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships

• Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
• Importance of learning and development. Children develop and learn at different rates. The education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

There are seven areas of learning and development that shape our educational programmes at Rookery School. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected.

There are three areas that are particularly important for building a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships and thriving.

These are the prime areas:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development

We also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied.

The specific areas are:

- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

4.2 Planning

Our curriculum is carefully planned to provide a clear, ambitious progression for all children, rooted in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and guided by children's interests and developmental needs. The curriculum clearly identifies the foundational knowledge and skills, as outlined in the EYFS and national curriculum, that children will need for later learning.

Language is the bedrock of thinking and learning. **"Every interaction is an intervention"**

It is priority in the curriculum to give children sufficient high-quality opportunities to practise using foundational knowledge and skills so that they become fluent.

We begin by identifying what we want children to learn (our curriculum intent), ensuring it is broad, balanced, and inclusive. This includes a strong focus on communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, and physical development as key foundations.

From this, we develop a carefully sequenced curriculum that builds progressively on children's knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Long-term plans provide an overview of the key themes, concepts and experiences across the year, while medium-term plans identify the specific learning opportunities and intended outcomes within each area of learning. Short-term planning remains flexible and responsive, enabling practitioners to build on children's interests, ideas, prior learning and individual next steps as they emerge.

Our planning is informed by ongoing observation and assessment. Key staff regularly assess children's development and use this to adapt provision, ensuring all children, including those with SEND or from disadvantaged backgrounds, can access the curriculum and make progress.

We place strong emphasis on high-quality interactions and purposeful play. The environment is carefully organised to promote independence, curiosity, and sustained engagement, both indoors and outdoors.

We also ensure our curriculum reflects children's cultural backgrounds and experiences, while introducing them to new knowledge and the wider world.

Overall, our curriculum is dynamic and responsive, but always underpinned by clear progression and high expectations for every child.

Why this works

- Intent: Clear goals and ambition
- Implementation: Sequenced planning (long/medium/short term)
- Impact: Assessment-informed adaptations
- Inclusion: SEND and disadvantaged learners addressed
- Characteristics of Effective Learning embedded

Long term plans – Continuous provision and curriculum overview

Medium term plans – Enhanced provision plan

Short term plans – weekly focussed

4.3 Teaching

Our setting is committed to ensuring that all children develop strong language, communication and early learning skills through high-quality teaching, purposeful interactions and carefully planned experiences.

Language and Communication

We promote children's language and vocabulary development across all areas of learning through consistent daily routines and meaningful interactions. Children are supported to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently. The Shrec approach and Voice 21 is embedded so children have the scaffolds and modelling to support this.

High-Quality Adult–Child Interactions

Practitioners engage children in rich, purposeful interactions that extend learning. Staff support children by:

- Modelling clear and accurate language
- Scaffolding learning to build understanding
- Extending children's ideas and introducing new vocabulary

These interactions enable children to articulate what they know and deepen their understanding.

Developing an Enjoyment of Language

We foster children's emotional connection to language through regular use of songs, rhymes and poems. This supports children in developing confidence, expressive language and an awareness and control of their voice.

Reading and Storytelling (Story spine & Talk Through Stories)

Story time is prioritised daily.

- Read aloud high-quality texts
- Revisit familiar stories to build confidence and understanding
- Engage children in discussions to develop comprehension and language skills

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Early Mathematics (Mastery in Number)

We support children to develop mathematical understanding by:

- Encouraging them to notice and describe patterns, quantities and shapes in their environment
- Promoting enjoyment and confidence in using mathematical language

Mathematics teaching is carefully sequenced to ensure concepts are introduced, developed and embedded over time.

Intentional and Responsive Teaching

Staff plan and deliver learning experiences that are tailored to children's individual needs, ages and starting points. Activities are designed to:

- Maintain children's focus on key learning objectives
- Build on prior knowledge
- Provide appropriate challenge and support

Additional teaching and practice are provided where required to ensure all children can succeed.

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5. Assessment

At Rookery school, ongoing assessment for learning is an integral part of the learning and development processes. Opportunities are provided for children to practise, revisit and consolidate their knowledge and skills. Assessments pick up children's misunderstandings quickly and provide early opportunities to help children who need extra teaching and practice.

At the end of the EYFS, staff complete the EYFS profile for each child. Pupils are assessed against the 17 early learning goals, indicating whether they are:

- Meeting expected levels of development
- Exceeding expected levels or,
- Not yet reaching expected levels ('emerging')

The profile reflects ongoing observations and discussions with parents and/or carers. The results of the profile are then shared with parents and/or carers.

Core Skills Development in Reception

Children in Reception are given frequent opportunities to develop:

- A secure and comfortable pencil grip
- Early reading and spelling skills
- Handwriting fluency
- Recall of key number facts

Prioritising Interaction

We place a strong emphasis on direct engagement with children. Practitioners prioritise high-quality interactions ensuring that time is used effectively to support children's learning and development.

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6. Working with parents

We recognise that children learn and develop well when there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.

Parents and/or carers are kept up to date with their child's progress and development through Class Dojo and SeeSaw. This helps to provide parents and/or carers with a well-rounded picture of their child's knowledge, understanding and abilities.

Each child's teacher is the key person who helps to ensure that their learning and care is tailored to meet their needs. The teacher and teaching assistant support parents and/or carers in guiding their child's development at home. The key person also helps families to engage with more specialist support, if appropriate.

There are several workshops over the year to engage parents to ensure a strong relationship between school and home

7. Safeguarding and welfare procedures

Our safeguarding and welfare procedures are outlined in our safeguarding policy.

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed and approved by HT annually every two of years.

At every review, the policy will be shared with the governing board.

Appendix 1. Summary of our Early Years Philosophy

At Rookery School in the Early years we have adopted elements of the following approaches:

Montessori where the method promotes independence in learners through carefully designed self-directed activities and environments both inside and outside the classroom.

Key points:

- environment encourages hands-on learning
- resources are natural and open-ended
- adults play a crucial role in supporting development in children's own time
- 5 curriculum areas; sensorial life, practical life, mathematics, language and culture

Reggio Emilia – We place children at the centre of practice. Children are seen to have unlimited potential where adults support and promote the children's interests.

Key points:

- children are encouraged to express themselves and the '100 languages' metaphor explains the many varied ways children demonstrate understanding
- promotes independence, resilience and exploration
- adults should support not instruct learning

Forest School – Where there are child-centred, hands-on experiences in a natural setting. Risk and vulnerability are central themes

Key points:

- long term process of regular sessions
- takes place mainly on our field where there is natural setting that we have enhanced with natural resources
- learner centred
- builds resilience, confidence, independence and creativity
- build opportunities to take supported risks
- run by qualified Forest School practitioners

The Curiosity Approach - It centres on providing a safe and comfortable environment for children to be curious.

Key points:

- real life resources
- neutral décor and natural materials
- promotion of children being independent thinkers
- homely environment so that children feel safe and comfortable

Steiner/Waldorf - Holistic development of pupils' intellectual, artistic, and practical skills in an integrated manner

Vygotsky – Exploring the value of play and impact of environment

Appendix 2. List of statutory policies and procedures for the EYFS

Statutory policy or procedure for the EYFS	Where can it be found?
Safeguarding policy and procedures	See child protection and safeguarding policy
Procedure for responding to illness	See health and safety policy
Emergency evacuation procedure	See health and safety policy
Procedure for checking the identity of visitors	See child protection and safeguarding policy
Procedures for a parent failing to collect a child and for missing children	See child protection and safeguarding policy
Procedure for dealing with concerns and complaints	See complaints policy

What is foundational knowledge?



Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate

Strong foundations in the first year of school | Ofsted webinar for schools, October 2024

