



DOWNSEND
SCHOOL
Inspiring Young Minds

**EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE
CURRICULUM GUIDE
LITTLE DOWNSEND**



EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE FRAMEWORK

What is the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework is a government document that all schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers in England must follow. It sets out the standards for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. The standards ensure your child will learn and develop well and is kept healthy and safe.

What will my child be learning?

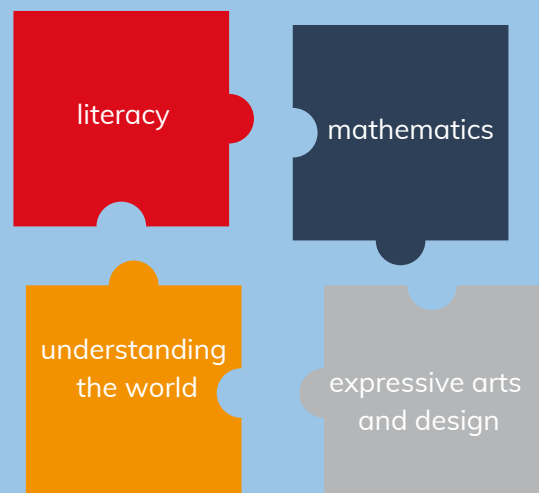
The EYFS framework outlines seven areas of learning development and educational programmes.

There are three **prime** areas of learning, which are particularly important for your child's development and future learning:



The prime areas of learning make up a crucial part of early development. Learning in these areas takes place every day and is integral to all other learning. The areas play a significant role in encouraging children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. They're a driving force behind helping children as they learn to form relationships, moderate emotions and thrive in their day-to-day life. Helping children to master the 'basics' by meeting the aims in the EYFS Prime Areas of Learning encourages long term skills. Supporting them developing these skills during EYFS is a way to help them grasp the underpinning skills they need to exceed in the EYFS specific areas of learning and then more traditional academic areas of learning in the future. Everything we teach is driven by the development of these early skills as we know a great foundation in them supports high future achievement.

There are four **specific** areas of learning, through which the prime areas are strengthened and applied:



We also use your child's needs and interests to plan challenging and enjoyable activities and experiences.

At Downsend we have a structured and intentional approach to the development of specific skills, particularly the areas of literacy and mathematics, ensuring the 'what comes before' skills of excellent reading, writing and mathematics for the future are intentionally delivered according to the age of the child, through both play and teacher led activities, enabling children to make rapid progress and achieve outstanding academic attainment according to their starting point.

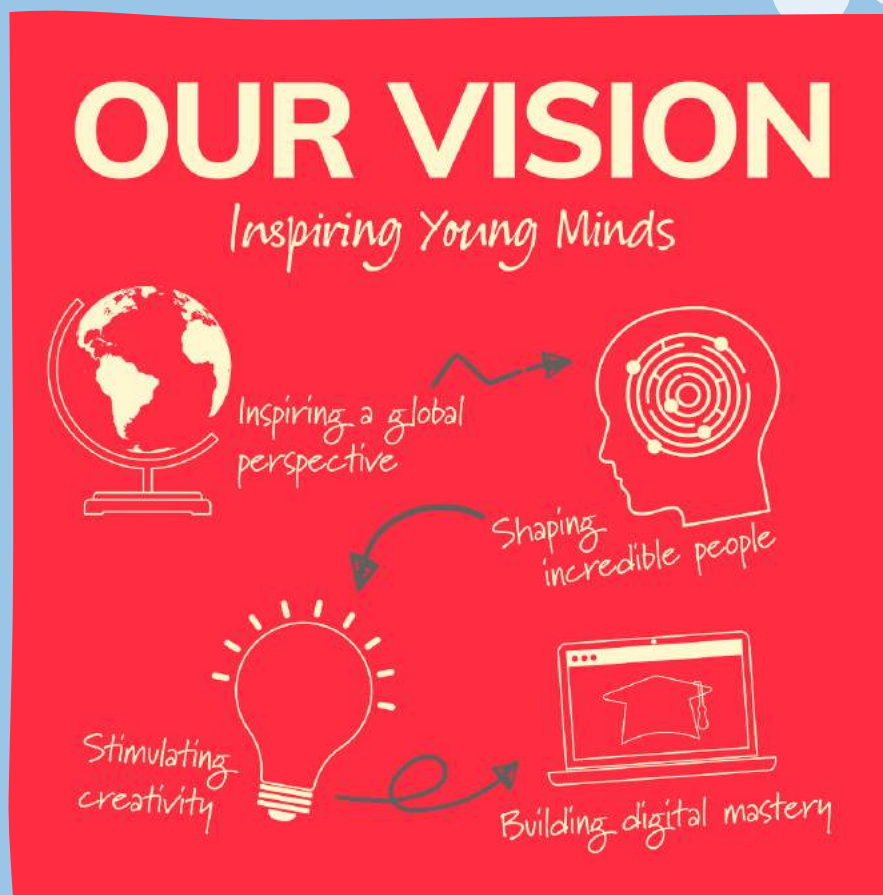
How will my child be learning?

The EYFS framework identifies the essential role of play in your child's development. It is through both child-led play and play guided by an adult that your child will develop confidence and relationships with others. Through play, adults will help your child to extend their vocabulary and develop their communication skills. While we have very high academic expectations at Little Downsend, this is never at the expense of a play-based, exciting curriculum.

The EYFS framework identifies three characteristics of effective teaching and learning:

- 1** playing and exploring
- 2** active learning
- 3** creating and thinking critically

All 3 characteristics of effective teaching and learning link into our school vision and aims and collectively, the vision, aims and EYFS drive our curriculum design.



THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

Our curriculum is designed to be exciting, engaging and relevant. It is aligned with our new vision and aims, so we are excited to be introducing whole school themes:



Inspiring a global perspective

Our key over-arching theme is 'building community', giving children the chance to learn more about their community, to appreciate diversity, to think about their environment and the people within it.

Our children need to have confidence and the ability to articulate themselves confidently. They need to have an opinion, and the language and vocabulary to engage in debate.



Shaping incredible people

Stimulating creativity



Creativity is at the very heart of our curriculum. Our children are naturally curious, so we embrace their sense of adventure, making every part of the learning a creative experience so we simply allow their skills to flourish.

Gently building in age-appropriate technology at the right times (such as beebots for coding and microscopes for studying leaves), we familiarise children with the tech they will need to stand them in good stead in the future.



Building digital mastery

The EYFS education at Little Downsend is delivered through 6 overarching themes where the vision and aims really come to life, digging deeper and exploring concepts in multiple ways ensuring breadth of conversation and a natural progression through the ages and stages from First Steps through to the end of Reception.

The 6 topics are:

- Autumn 1: All About Me
- Autumn 2: Our Wonderful World
- Spring 1: All About People
- Spring 2: Tell Me a Story
- Summer 1: Living things
- Summer 2: Journeys

We end each half term with a celebration event, where the whole school comes together to celebrate, discuss and share what they have learned.

READING

We see 2 main areas of focus in supporting children to become great readers:

- Taking joy and pleasure in books and stories – enjoying sharing stories with friends and adults and having stories read to them
- Developing the skills of reading – learning and applying phonic knowledge as well as additional reading strategies such as reading words, recognising repeated words by sight and using contextual and pictorial cues (note - there are also other additional reading strategies, these are just a few)

What does reading look like in First Steps?

We regularly share stories with children both for pleasure and also as a stimulus for learning and discussion in line with thematic, knowledge teaching, i.e. sharing a story about Autumn when learning about Autumn.

Books are everywhere in the school and children are encouraged to share stories with friends and adults during 'choosing time' when they play independently.

Early phonics begins in First Steps through activities focused on playing with sound and sounds such as environmental sounds, instrumental sounds and sounds we can make ourselves using our body or voice. The aim of early phonics activities are to develop children's skills in:

- Listening attentively
- Enlarging their vocabulary
- Speaking confidently to adults and other children about the sounds they can hear
- Discriminating between different sounds and explain how they are different

If children are able to 'play with', manipulate and identify different sounds around them all the time, phonics learning is far easier to access for them. If a child can 'tune in' and then differentiate between the sounds an aeroplane and a lawnmower make, talking about the difference, they will, for example, find hearing an a, e, i, o and u sound much easier.

Listening to and learning nursery rhymes, rhymes and poems through First Steps is also a key strategy in developing early reading skills as they combine both activities – developing joy and fun in reading alongside tuning into sounds.

What does reading look like in Rising Reception?

We continue to regularly share stories with children both for pleasure and also as a stimulus for learning and discussion in line with thematic, knowledge teaching and encourage children to read stories with adults and friends during choosing time.

We continue to develop early phonics skills in identifying and playing with:

- rhythm and rhyme
- alliteration

Continuing a high focus on nursery rhymes, rhymes and poems is crucial in continuing to develop these areas.

Within these skill areas, children start to play more with actual sounds (phonemes), using the sounds they can hear in real words.

In Rising Reception, we also introduce the phoneme (smallest unit of sound within a word) for each letter of the alphabet to the children through a structured scheme where one phoneme a week is introduced and then developed through a variety of play and adult focused activities as the week progresses. We aim that a child can recognise the phoneme, identify the sound it makes and play with the sound in the context of different early phonics activities, i.e. I spy. Alongside the introduction of the phonic sounds, we also develop sound discrimination activities into oral blending and segmenting activities, i.e. recognising c-a-t when put together makes the word cat (blending for reading) or being able to break the word bin into the individual phonemes of b-i-n (segmenting for spelling).

When a child is able to confidently recognise phonemes and orally blend with success, they will be ready for a reading book with words. For some children this will be during the Rising Reception year but it may not be for all. The children need to be developmentally ready and have mastered the pre-requisite skills in oral blending and phoneme recognition first, otherwise reading books is too challenging for them and negatively impacts on their motivation for reading.

What does reading look like in Reception?

A huge focus on reading for pleasure continues – as children start to build their reading skills up, their love of books and drive and determination to read them independently is a very strong motivator, supporting them to make excellent progress through their Reception year.

In the first few weeks of the Autumn term, the children will recap their phoneme learning from Rising Reception and then move onto further phonemes including digraphs (2 letters that make one sound/phoneme, i.e. sh, or, oi) and trigraphs (3 letter that make one sound/phoneme, i.e. igh, are).

In Reception, we listen to our children read every day and ask parents to do the same at home. Once the children are able to identify the required phonemes and can successfully blend phonemes together, it is practice, practice, practice that leads to great progress, confidence and fluency in reading.

Alongside the introduction of new phonemes, we start to introduce the children to 'tricky words'. These are high frequency words where phonic skills at the level children have at this age cannot be applied, i.e. the, said, no. Children are taught that there are some words where we can't use our phonics and we just have to learn what they look like so we can recognise them and read them straight away when we see them.



WRITING

We see 4 main components in supporting children to learn to become great writers:

- The physical skills to write – the strength, dexterity and fine motor control to hold a pencil and make it do what we want it to
- Having a purpose for writing
- Having the language, vocabulary and structure to write
- Having the skills to write words

Each of these components has a particular focus within our curriculum to ensure that when the time is right, children can become great writers.

Physical skills for writing

Physical activity forms a huge part of our day to day provision, being one of the EYFS prime areas, in all year groups developing children's gross motor skills, strength and muscle control through running, jumping, digging, climbing, hanging – all needed to support great writing. In addition, through classroom activities such as playdough, threading, puzzles and messy play, children are developing their finger strength and fine motor control. Without good gross motor control, fine motor control will be a struggle to develop and so both elements need to be developed across all age ranges.

The Write Dance programme

In addition to general physical activities, we also implement the Write Dance programme throughout all of our Early Years classrooms. The Write Dance programme is a gross motor to fine motor control programme focusing on making specific movements in a variety of creative ways: to songs, music, in shaving foam, chalk, with water and paintbrushes on fences etc The theory behind this programme is that if a child can make horizontal, vertical, clockwise and anti-clockwise movements in different ways, in large scale and then small scale, when it comes to writing real letter shapes, they have already started to develop the muscle memory for their arms/hands to make these movements.



A purpose for writing

Motivation to write/make marks can often be an activity young children would not actively choose so we work hard throughout our teaching and provision during 'choosing time' to create fun and engaging opportunities for children to 'write' or make marks to develop their motivation to take part in these types of activities.

Message Centre

In every classroom we have a 'Message Centre' that is equipped with all the materials needed to write. The Message Centre can move around the classroom and visit different areas of the classroom, for instance, one week it may be in the roleplay area and the next week in the construction area. It could be indoors, outdoors or both. We have found the Message Centre to be a huge motivator for children – the nature of being a message centre, rather than a writing or mark making area, straight away gives the children an exciting and engaging purpose to 'write'.

As the children move through the Early Years, the teachers will also be providing different specific opportunities to write, modelling the writing process to the children with them writing their own lists, stories or explanations.

The language, vocabulary and structure to write

We pride ourselves on our skills and success in developing children's speech, language and communication skills. Our children develop great language and broaden their vocabulary while they are with us through our very high focus in this area. Our teaching team spend the vast majority of their day playing with and interacting with the children progressing them at a rapid pace.

Talk for writing

Every half term, each class focuses on a Talk for Writing text. For the age of our children, the Talk for Writing approach enables children to orally retell (imitate) and then innovate and invent their own stories. Children learn to retell their focus text using a simplified text structure carefully planned to include the vocabulary and language structure teachers want them to develop. The children are taught the story through the use of a story map and actions to help prompt and remind them about the next part of the story.

A key feature of the programme is that children internalise the language structures and vocabulary from the taught stories so that they can apply them in their own stories and then into writing their own stories when the time is right (usually during the Reception year but it can be before).

MATHEMATICS

We teach number from First Steps, all the way through to the end of Reception using the Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract (CPA) approach as developed by American psychologist Jerome Bruner. This is an approach that develops a deep and sustainable understanding of the number system for children, enabling them to build exceptionally strong foundations and to make rapid pace as they progress through more complex areas of mathematics in their education.

'Concrete' step of CPA

Concrete is all about “doing”. During this stage, children use concrete objects to model problems. Within the Early Years, we spend a lot of time at this stage as physical manipulatives are key in developing early understanding but through every EY classroom, all 3 steps will be used. Every abstract concept is first introduced using physical, interactive concrete materials so the children can visualise the concept.

For example, if a problem involves adding pieces of fruit, children can first handle actual fruit. From there, they can progress to handling abstract counters or cubes which represent the fruit.



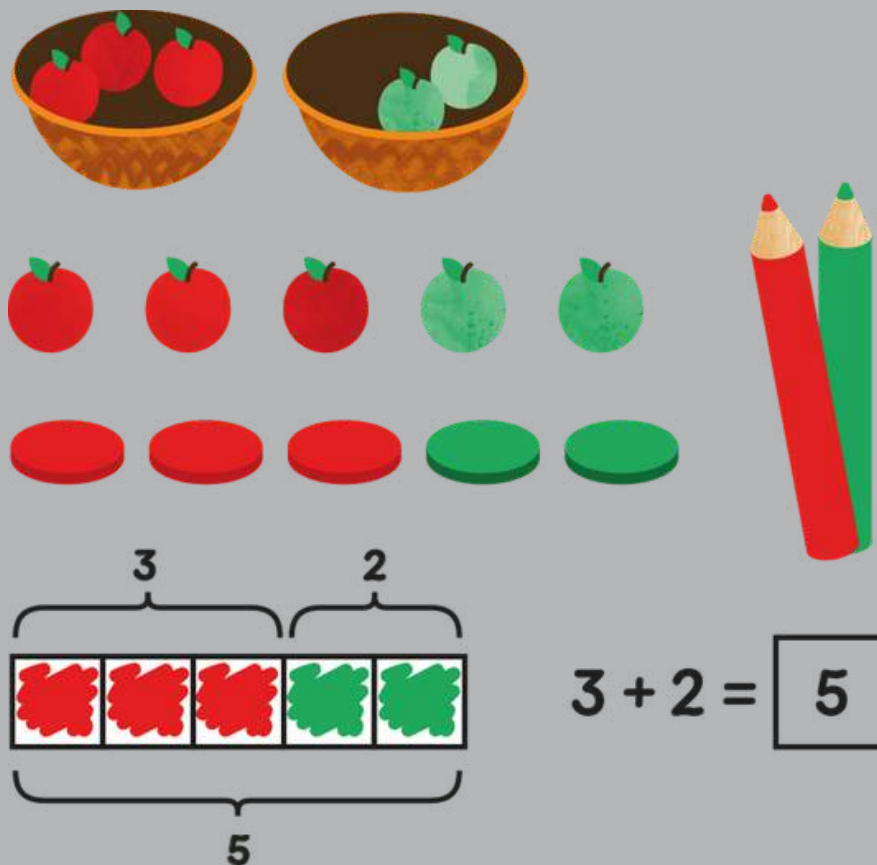
'Pictorial' step of CPA

Pictorial is all about “seeing” and representing. Here, visual representations of concrete objects are used. This stage encourages children to make a mental connection between the physical object handled and the abstract pictures, diagrams or models that represent the objects.

Building or drawing a model makes it easier for children to grasp more challenging abstract concepts such as number bonds and then concepts such as fractions at a later stage. Simply put, it helps students visualise abstract problems to make them more accessible.

'Abstract' step of CPA

Abstract is the “symbolic” stage, where children use abstract symbols to represent number, including the numerals themselves which without context, are abstract. Children are introduced to concept at this stage at a symbolic level, using only numbers, notation, and mathematical symbols, i.e. $3 + 2 = 5$



Using the CPA approach, the most important priority for us in securing number is to develop number sense within our children – an understanding of the concept of number.

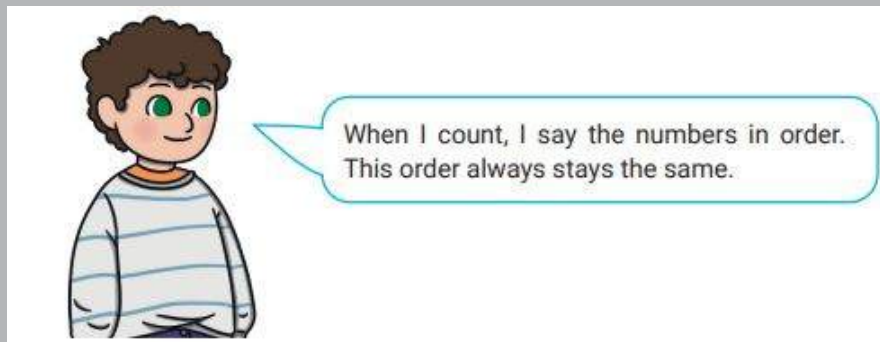
To have a strong number sense, children must be secure in:

- Counting and cardinality
- How numbers are composed
- How numbers compare to each other

Counting and cardinality are developed in 5 hierarchical stages:

1. The Stable order principle
2. The one to one principle
3. The cardinal principle
4. The abstract principle
5. The order-irrelevance principle

The Stable Order Principle

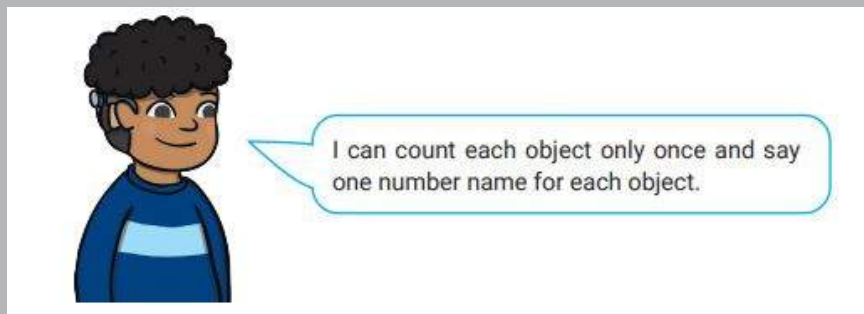


The stable order principle refers to number names being said in a certain order, knowing that the order of the numbers will not change and will always be said in the same order. As number names have no recognisable pattern until we reach the number fourteen, this can be a challenge for children. Young children will begin by rote counting numbers without meaning, often by memorising numbers from songs and rhymes. The order of these numbers will then begin to develop meaning as children begin to recognise why numbers names are said in this order.

Skills needed for the stable order principle:

- Know the names of numbers in order.
- Understand that these numbers are always said in the same order.

The One-One Principle

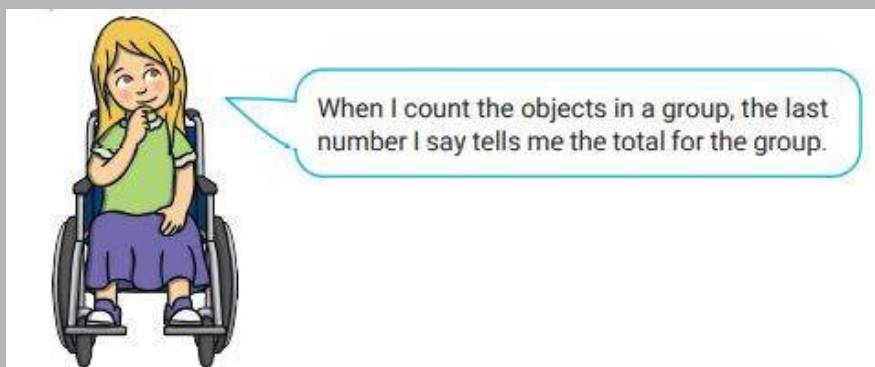


The one-one principle refers to the need to count each object in a group once and only once. Young children can be helped to do this by touching each object as they say the number name, this can help children to keep track of the objects that have been counted and ensure that they only count each object once.

Skills needed for the one-one principle:

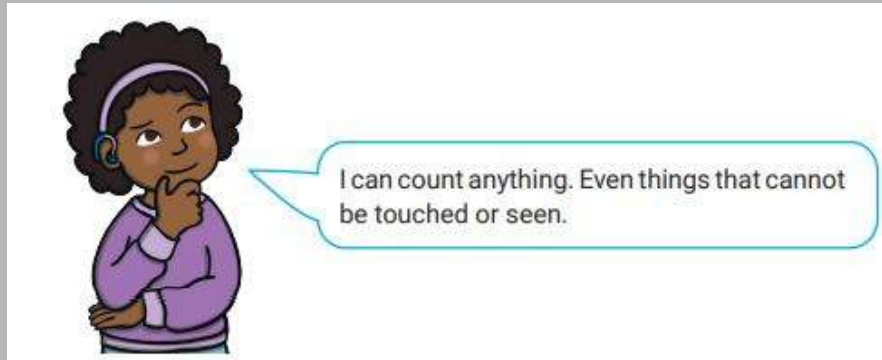
- Recite number names in order. The number of objects a child can count will be limited to the list of numbers they can say.
- Coordinate both their counting and their motor movements, so that the object is counted and touched at the same time.
- Keep track of objects that have been counted and those that need to be counted.

The Cardinal Principle



The cardinal principle refers to children recognising that the final number said, when counting a group, is special because this number tells them how many objects are in the group. For children to understand the cardinal principle, they must first have a good understanding of both the one-one principle and the stable order principle. When children have understood the cardinal principle, they would be able to count a group of objects and then answer the question, 'How many?' by recalling the last number and not having to re-count the objects.

The Abstraction Principle

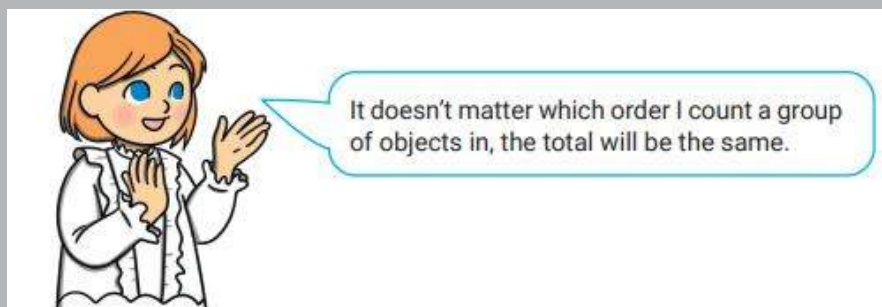


The abstraction principle refers to the understanding that anything can be counted, even things that cannot be touched, moved or seen. When children are first learning to count, it is easier for them to count physical objects that can be seen, touched and moved. As children begin to develop their counting skills, they can begin to understand that they can also count non-physical things, such as sounds, movements and even imaginary objects.

Skills needed for the abstraction principle:

- Have a good understanding of the previous three principles.
- Able to keep track of their counting without being able to see or touch each item being counted.
- Understands that objects in a set can be different sizes, colours and shapes.

The Order-Irrelevance Principle



The order-irrelevance principle refers to the understanding that the order in which objects are counted is not important. Objects within a group can be counted from left to right, right to left or from somewhere else. As long as every object is counted, and only counted once, then the total will always be the same. This may seem like a simple principle but children who do not understand this principle may need to re-count a group if the objects are moved.

Skills needed for the order-irrelevance principle:

- Have a good understanding of the one-one, stable order and cardinal principles.
- Understand that the number they previously assigned each object is temporary and a different number can be assigned the next time the group is counted.

In First Steps we focus mainly on the stable order and one to one principles, starting to move into understanding cardinality.

In Rising Reception, our greatest focus is on cardinality and the introduction of composition and comparison. In Rising Reception we focus on one number at a time, developing all 3 concepts together within each number. For example, when we teach 3, we teach cardinality through what 3 actually is (3 people, 3 spots, 3 cars, 3 pencils, 3 crosses on a page, the numeral 3), composition through understanding 3 can be made in different ways and comparison by knowing that 3 is bigger than 1 and 2 but smaller than other numbers and using the CPA approach to explain why.



By the end of Rising Reception, we would expect children to be secure in all 5 principles of counting so that we can start to develop their calculation skills in all 4 operations in Reception.

Of course, number is not the only area of mathematics we focus on. Spatial reasoning through shape, space and measures (geometry) activities are also a key part of our day to day provision and teaching. These concepts are also taught through a CPA approach, i.e. knowing a triangle is a triangle:

- Play with triangle shapes – build with them, connect magnetic triangular tiles, make triangles with sticks (concrete)
- See triangle shapes on a page/draw triangles (pictorial)
- Use the word triangle (abstract) and visualise a triangle through the concrete and pictorial work



An Enriched Curriculum

All Little Downsend Teaching and Learning activities are practical, experiential and engaging. We know that happy, motivated children make the very best progress and so our teachers plan and deliver a curriculum that is designed to help each child achieve brilliantly in the basics – as well as providing rocket fuel to their softer skills – their ability to be resilient, to adapt to change, to be confident and to learn from failure. Above all, our learning is playful, fun and exciting!



Our specialist lessons take place each week to strengthen further, broaden and enrich the experience for children across all areas of learning:

French – all year groups

Studies show that children learning an additional language at a young age are more creative and better at solving complex problems. We teach French through songs, puppets, stories and lots of visuals. Children learn basic nouns and verbs, learn greetings, counting and colours as well as plenty more!



Music – all year groups

The benefits of children learning music are widely researched and shared showing that music can enhance brain function, memory, attention and concentration, support the development of language and mathematical skills as well as just being a joyful experience! The children sing, play, move and use musical vocabulary confidently from First Steps all the way through to Reception. As the children move into Year 1, they also all start to learn the ukulele.



Dance – all year groups

We teach dance for the benefits to health and well-being as well as the additional benefits it brings to improving muscle tone and strength to support the early development of writing. Moving creatively to music is something that comes naturally to young children and so capturing and developing this creativity alongside supporting children's awareness of their body and how it moves make dance one of the highlights of the children's week.



Forest School – all year groups

Our First Steps and Rising Reception children enjoy Forest School weekly and our Reception children once every 3 weeks. Forest School aims to foster resilience, confidence, independence and creativity in children. It offers children the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.



Swimming – Reception

When the children reach Reception they have weekly swimming lessons at Downsend main site. Lessons are differentiated according to the children's individual swimming level with progression focusing on water confidence, independent swimming and then stamina and stroke technique.

Sports coaching – Reception

Weekly games lessons are taught by specialist sports coaches with a focus on basic skills developing agility, balance and hand-eye co-ordination through to specific skills for games such as catching, throwing, kicking and striking.

HOW WILL I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?

Every teacher works alongside their teaching team to observe and continually evaluate each child's progress, using that information to inform the next steps in their teaching and planning. There are no formal assessments in our EYFS classrooms, all assessment is made by the teachers through their gained knowledge of the children: what they say, do and produce day to day both independently and when working with adults.

Our teaching teams use their professional knowledge to understand each child's level of development using the EYFS ages and stages as a guide.

At least weekly, you will receive an observation on Tapestry giving you an insight into how your child is progressing within the classroom. While we would love to provide you with more regular information, it is important for us that the teachers time is spent being present, active and interactive with the children while they are in the classroom, not using a device to photograph and record activities.

In October/November and February, you are invited to school for a parent/teacher consultation to discuss progress.

At the end of each term, you will receive a written report detailing progress and achievements against developmental milestones. At the end of the Autumn and Spring term, reports focus on progress towards termly targets set. At the end of the Summer term, a full annual report is provided by the teachers.

In First Steps, between the ages of 24 and 36 months, a two-year progress check is completed by the class teacher. This will replace an end of term report as appropriate.

At the end of Reception, teachers complete the Early Years Foundation Stage profile for each pupil, assessing them against the Early Learning Goals. This is a National, statutory assessment for all children at the end of Reception, even applying to us as an Independent school.





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