DOWNSEND SCHOOL

Early Years Policy

Little Downsend

September 2026

Registered in England & Wales - Cognita Schools Limited No. 02313425

Registered Office: Seebeck House, One Seebeck Place Knowlhill, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK5 8FR

COGNITA

THRIVE IN A RAPIDLY EVOLVING WORLD

1 Terminology

1.1 The Early Years age group defines children aged from birth until the 31st August following their fifth birthday who go to an early years setting that delivers the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Age 6-15 months (Bright Beginners)
- Age 16-24 months (Early Learners)
- Age 2 – 3 years (First Steps)
- Age 3– 4 years (Rising Reception)
- Age 4 5 years (Reception)

1.2 Registered Provision refers to provision for children under two years of age. Settings must register for Early Years provision with the DfE if they provide for:

- Children aged from birth to under two years and at least one child attends for more than two hours a day; and/or
- Children who are not pupils at the school, such as a separate pre-school, a nursery for children of staff members or a nursery in a children's centre run by the school (it does not have to be on the school premises to be run directly by the school).

1.3. EYFS refers to Early Years Foundation Stage.

2 Aim

2.1 Across all three Little Downsends, we aim to provide the highest quality care and education for all of our children, thereby giving them a strong foundation for their future learning. We create a safe and happy environment with motivating and enjoyable learning experiences that enable children to become confident and independent learners. We value the individual child and work alongside parents and others to meet their needs in order for children to make good progress.

3 Statutory Framework

3.1 We adhere to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework for group and school-based providers, effective from 1 September 2026. Our curriculum is informed by non-statutory guidance, including Development Matters and Birth to Five Matters, where appropriate. The four guiding principles that shape practice within Early Years settings are outlined below:

- 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.

4 Principles into Practice

4.1 As part of our practice we:

- Provide a balanced curriculum, based on the EYFS, across the seven areas of learning, using play as the vehicle for learning.
- Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. We provide early intervention for those children who require additional support;
- Work in partnership with parents and within the wider context;
- Plan challenging learning experiences, based on the individual child, informed by observation, assessment and the child's interest;

- Provide opportunities for children to engage in activities that are adult-initiated and child-initiated, supported by the adult;
- Have a key person approach to develop close relationships with individual children; and
- Provide a secure and safe learning environment, indoors and out.

5 The Early Years Curriculum

5.1 We plan an exciting and challenging curriculum based on our observation of children's needs, interests and stages of development across the seven areas of learning to enable the children to achieve and exceed the Early Learning Goals.

5.2 All of the seven areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. The Prime Areas of Learning are the essential foundations for children to work with and master before progressing to the Specific Areas of Learning.

Prime Areas of Learning		
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	**Physical Development**	**Communication and Language**
		

Specific Areas of Learning			
Literacy	**Mathematics**	**Understanding the World**	**Expressive Arts and Design**
			

5.3 Children are provided with a range of rich, meaningful first-hand experiences in which they explore, think creatively and are active. We aim to develop and foster positive attitudes towards learning, confidence, communication, and physical development.

5.4 In the Early Years, long term and medium-term planning is completed using the EYFS, based on a series of topics, each of which offers experiences in all seven areas. This is reflected both inside the classrooms and at the outside learning areas. We also follow the children's interests where appropriate. Please see plans for more details. The planning then informs our short-term weekly planning, alongside our observations, which remain flexible for unplanned circumstances or children's responses.

5.5 Practitioners working with the youngest children will focus strongly on the three prime areas, which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas. The three prime areas reflect the key skills and capacities all children need to develop and learn effectively and become ready for school. The balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning as the children move through the Early Years and grow in confidence and ability within the three prime areas.

5.6 Children have whole group and small group teaching and learning times which increase as they progress through the EYFS. Time awarded to each subject in each year group is proportionate to the age and stage of the child. For example, in FS and RR there will be one taught phonics lesson a week encompassing Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 phonics using 'Letters and Sounds', compared to Reception who will have at least 4 lessons. Aspects of Mathematics and Literacy, including shared and writing are also taught in an age-appropriate way. Early Years classrooms are also used so that subjects can be accessed at all times by pupils i.e. role play corner, book corner, maths station and continuous provision. The curriculum is delivered using a play-based approach, as outlined by the EYFS. Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities. We plan a balance between children having time and space to engage in their own child-initiated activities and those that are planned by the adults. During children's play, Early Years practitioners interact to stretch and challenge children further and develop their language skills for communicating.

5.7 In planning and guiding children's activities, we reflect as practitioners on the different ways that children learn and build these into our practice. We create a stimulating environment to encourage children to free-flow between inside and outside.

6 Regulatory Requirements

6.1 We ensure that we implement the new Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (September 2026) and meet the associated regulatory requirements. Early Years Leaders will attend training in the regulatory requirements.

7 Observation and Assessment

7.1 As part of daily practice, children's development is observed and assessed through an online platform (Tapestry). This online system allows Early Years staff to observe, track and monitor children's progress and achievements, and is evidenced in their individual profiles. Staff observe each of the seven areas of development, helping to work towards Early Learning Goals, as well as highlighting any areas for extra support that may be needed. This platform is also accessible to parents, allowing them to see their child's progress and add observations and information of their own. This also helps to build a well-rounded profile and supports our strong parent partnership.

7.2 The school complies with requirements to complete the Two-Year-Old Assessment Progress Check for all children: 2-3 years.

7.3 The school's assessment process for the Early Years is based on observations and teachers' professional judgement using guidance from Development Matters for children aged 2-5 years and using Birth to Five Matters for children under 2 years. Children's progress is logged on a highlighting document to identify children's age and stage of development and to create a strong basis for assessment.

7.4 Within the final term of Reception, we provide parents with a report based on their child's development against each of the Early Learning Goals and the characteristics of their learning, including strengths and next steps in learning. The parents are then given the opportunity to discuss these judgements with the Reception teacher in preparation for Year One. Little Downsend Ashtead is a Nursery with the oldest children aged 3-4 years and there is no Reception class at this site.

8 Safety

8.1 Children's safety and welfare is paramount. We create a safe and secure environment and provide a curriculum which teaches children how to be safe, make choices and assess risks. We have stringent policies, procedures and documents in place to ensure children's safety.

8.2 We promote the good health of the children in our care in numerous ways, including the provision of nutritious food, and following set procedures when children become ill or have an accident.

9 Inclusion

9.1 We value all our children as individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, religion, home language, background, ability or gender. We plan a curriculum that meets the needs of the individual child and supports them at their own pace so that most of our children achieve and even exceed the Early Learning Goals. We strongly believe that early identification of children with additional needs is crucial in enabling us to give the child the support that they need and in doing so, work closely with parents and outside agencies. See our separate policies on Equal Opportunities and Learning Support.

10 Partners

10.1 We strive to create and maintain partnerships with parents and carers as we recognise that together we can have a significant impact on a child's learning. We welcome and actively encourage parents to participate confidently in their child's education and care in numerous ways.

10.2 Working with other services and organisations is integral to our practice in order to meet the needs of our children. At times we may need to share information with other professionals to provide the best support possible.

10.3 We draw on our links with the community to enrich children's experiences by taking them on visits and inviting members of the community into our setting.

11 Transitions

11.1 Transitions are carefully planned for, and time is given to ensure continuity of learning. At any transition, we acknowledge the child's needs and establish effective partnerships with those involved with the child and other settings, including nurseries and childminders. Children attend introductory sessions to each of their year groups classes to develop familiarity with the setting and new teachers/practitioners.

11.2 In the final term of Reception, the Year One teacher will meet with the Early Years staff and discuss each child's development against the Early Learning Goals to support a smooth transition to Year One. This discussion helps the Year One teacher to plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet the needs of all children.

12 Reasonable Force/Restrain

12.1 There are regular periods of time in the Early Years where staff are in Physical Contact with the children due to their young age, particularly in the Early Years. Discussions with parents on physical contact are had before the child starts to ensure they are fully aware on this. The term ‘reasonable force’ covers a variety of circumstances such as consoling a child when upset, removing them from a piece of equipment, preventing them from hurting themselves or another and gently restraining them during an emotional outburst.

Ownership and consultation	
Document sponsor	Group Director of Education
Document author	Mrs Karen Nicholson, Headteacher, Education Advisor
Consultation – May 2018	Consultation with the following schools: Downsend Ashtead Pre-Prep School, Downsend Epsom Pre-Prep School, Downsend Leatherhead Pre-Prep School, Polam School, North Bridge House Nursery and Pre-Prep School, Glenesk School and El Limonar Villamartin.
Update – April 2021	No material changes
Update – Apr 2022	Changes made in line with new EYFS curriculum
Update – July 2023	Changes made in line with new EYFS curriculum
Update – July 2024	Changes made in line with new EYFS curriculum
Update – July 2025	Changes made in line with new EYFS curriculum
Update – September 2026	Changes made in line with new EYFS curriculum

Audience	
Audience	All Early Years staff

Document application and publication	
England	Yes
Wales	Yes
Spain	Yes

Version control	
Implementation date	September 2026
Review date	September 2027

Related documentation	
Related documentation	Admissions Policy Health and Safety Policy Equal Opportunities Policy SEND Policy Behaviour Policy First Aid Policy