

Appletree Gardens First School Early Years Policy



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Early Years Policy

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“All children deserve the care and support they need to have the best start in life. Children learn and develop at a faster rate from birth to five years old than at any other time in their lives, so their experiences in early years have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe, and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high-quality early learning provide the foundation children need to fulfil their potential.” Statutory Framework for the EYFS, October 2024.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

At Appletree Gardens First School, we greatly value the importance of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in providing children with a secure foundation for future learning and development. We offer a curriculum rich in language and experiences with stimulating learning environments both indoors and outdoors where children can develop and reach their potential in all the areas of learning.

THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The EYFS applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. The EYFS Statutory Framework is the document used to guide practitioners to plan challenging learning experiences within a stimulating and engaging environment and to assess the development and progress of each child.

Overarching Principles in the EYFS Statutory Framework

There are four guiding principles which shape practice in early years settings:

1. Every child is a **UNIQUE CHILD**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
2. Children learn to be strong and independent through **POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**.
3. 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.
4. Importance of **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**. Children develop and learn at different rates.

(EYFS Framework 2024, Pg.7)



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These four principles support Appletree's GROW YOUR LEARNING ethos:

I am healthy / I can reach my potential / I am happy and safe

I have opportunities / I have a voice

The EYFS Framework identifies the **Characteristics of Learning**, which are embedded through all areas of learning and include:

1. **Playing and Exploring** - Finding out and exploring, playing with what they know and being willing to 'have a go'.
2. **Active Learning** - Being involved and concentrating, keeping trying, enjoying achieving what they set out to do.
3. **Creating and Thinking Critically** - Having their own ideas, making links, choosing ways to do things.

EYFS Areas of Learning:

In the EYFS, there are seven areas of learning and development. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

These three areas, the prime areas, are:

- 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

All subject areas are delivered through a balance of adult led and child initiated activities. This balance develops across the key stage with short, interactive adult led songs and games in Little Pips through to more structured lessons and adult directed tasks in Reception.

Ofsted - Strong Foundations in the First Years of School:

Research is clear that high-quality **early education** establishes the foundations for later success, including academic achievement, good health and well-being.

([Strong foundations in the first years of school - GOV.UK](#), October 2024)

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OUR CURRICULUM

We have carefully constructed a curriculum that is progressive, inclusive and engaging for all learners. **Language development** is at the heart of our Early Years curriculum and staff are determined to ensure that all activities and environments are language rich (see **Grow Your Language** Appendix 1). We follow half-termly topics to ignite children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Within our topics we provide a range of carefully planned, exciting, stimulating and challenging activities to ensure high quality play, both inside and outside. Alongside this, children in the Early Years benefit from experienced staff who have a strong understanding of child development and are responsive to the individual needs and interests of all of our children, consistently providing high quality interactions and supporting language development.



“Children get off to a flying start in early years. Children display a love for learning. They sustain concentration in their play. Right from the start of school, children benefit from well-planned activities.” Ofsted, 2024

We are passionate about ensuring our children **‘Grow Their Learning’** during their time at Appletree and we are confident that our curriculum and provision, alongside the excellent relationships established, provide our children with the golden threads needed to achieve this: I am healthy; I can reach my potential; I am happy and safe; I have opportunities; I have a voice.



The EYFS **environments** are organised to allow children to explore and learn securely and safely. The classrooms are set up in learning areas, where children are encouraged to find and locate equipment and resources independently. The EYFS classrooms have access to an enclosed outdoor area and also use

the Nature Zone which runs alongside the nursery and reception gardens.

We use the Nature Zone for our weekly **Forest School** sessions which have a hugely positive effect on the children's wellbeing and development. Being outdoors and exploring Forest School offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors. It enables the children to explore, use their senses, be physically active and explore risky play.



Across Early Years we are passionate about developing a **love of reading** and do this through sharing songs, nursery rhymes and stories. We have a carefully selected list of core texts which enhance the children's learning experiences and provide opportunities to explore and develop their vocabulary. This passion



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for talking, reading and stories helps develop crucial early literacy skills (see EEF's 'Preparing for Literacy' document [EEF Preparing Literacy Poster](#)). We also use Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing; Greg Bottrill's Drawing Club; and Shonette Bason's Dough Disco and Squiggle Whilst You Wiggle programmes to support the development of language and communication, physical development, reading and writing. We use the WellComm speech and language toolkit to screen the children and then provide personalised interventions where appropriate to ensure all children 'have a voice' and can 'reach their potential'.



We also provide a range of real life experiences including: cookery; gardening; Forest School; stay and play sessions for parents and carers; and various trips (e.g. Monkseaton Library, Whitehouse Farm, St. Mary's Lighthouse, Shiremoor Adventure Playground, The Rising Sun Country Park). These experiences ensure there is also a rich breadth to our curriculum.



EARLY YEARS PROVISION

2 Year Old Provision - 'Little Pips':



Our 'Little Pips' provision offers both funded and fee paying places for two year olds and is located in Appletree Annex. We offer morning, afternoon or full day sessions. Our trained practitioners complete the 2 year old progress check with all children. Our Little Pips team have achieved the '2 Matters' Award which involved working with the local authority on an extensive audit to reflect on and improve teaching and learning with our youngest children.

Ratios within Little Pips will always remain at 1:5 or below. Little Pips staff have key worker groups and they build excellent relationships, enabling them to provide personalised learning experiences. The children enjoy engaging, hands-on experiences in a language rich environment where story-telling, songs and rhymes are at the heart of the curriculum.

3 Year Old Provision - Nursery:

We offer both 15 hour and 30 hour places in Nursery. The children accessing 15 hours attend Nursery for five mornings or five afternoons. The children accessing 30 hours attend for 5 full days. In order to confirm their eligibility, families provide us with their code which we enter into the Validity Checker. The children who take up the 30 Hours offer will be offered a lunch session in our Annex



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(for a small, additional, daily fee). The OOSC staff collect the children from the school Nursery and take them for lunch, then bring them back to Nursery.

We have three intakes throughout the year in September and January and April. Ratios within Nursery will always remain at 1:13 or below. If all available Nursery spaces become full, we will keep a waiting list on a 'first come, first served' basis.

Some of our Nursery children transition from Little Pips but a large proportion have either not been in any childcare setting or may have attended a private nursery. Our Nursery staff ensure both the children and their families are well supported during this transition period and we complete rigorous baseline observations and assessments to ensure we understand the starting points of our children to best enable us to help them 'grow their learning' and reach their potential.



Wraparound Childcare:

We also offer Wraparound care for the children who only access 15 hours in Nursery. These paid for sessions are within our Little Pips room. The Early Years lead, Out Of School Club manager, Little Pips and Nursery staff work together closely to manage our 2 and 3 year old provision and ensure consistency and progression across the environment and curriculum.

Reception:

We have two 30 place Reception classes. Children progress to the Reception classes part time for the first week before staying for lunch and then coming to school full time. This part-time intake ensures a rigorous and smooth transition for the children and provides time for them to become familiar with the new environment, provision, staff and routines. It also provides time for staff to form excellent relationships with the children and their families and therefore plan the very best learning opportunities for them.



A number of our children come to our reception from other settings. We contact these settings to share information and children are invited for visits in the summer term before they join reception. In some cases, Appletree staff may visit the new children in their current settings to aid transition.

The reception staff continue to build on the foundations started in Little Pips and Nursery as the children continue to 'Grow their Learning' and reach their full potential. Our carefully constructed curriculum develops the children's

knowledge and skills to best enable them to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of Reception. We also use a range of research based interventions to provide additional, targeted support where appropriate (Thrive, WellComm, RWI Keep Up, Maths pre-teach).

We are committed to ensuring all children have the **foundational skills** (PSE, communication and language, phonics, reading, comprehension and basic writing skills) they need to access the next stage in their learning journey. See [Strong foundations in the first years of school - GOV.UK](#) for more details about 'foundational skills'.



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Reception and Year 1 staff then work very closely together to ensure a robust transition into Key Stage 1. This includes visits to new classrooms, Year 1 staff visiting reception children in their current classrooms, 'meet the teacher' opportunities for families and meetings to share data and contextual information.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

We recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value being partners with them in their child's education through:

- Building relationships with parents before their child even starts in our school through; parent/carer meetings, individual appointments for admissions, welcome packs, 'All about me' packs, home/school diaries.
- Offering both parents and children the opportunity to spend time in their new classrooms before starting school: visits to Little Pips, Nursery and Reception classes, Reception and Forest School.
- Operating an open door policy for parents with any queries - this also provides daily opportunities to share any concerns or successes about the children with parents.
- Sharing the children's online Seesaw 'Learning Journeys' with parents and valuing the ongoing contributions to this from parents.
- Offering two parent/teacher consultations per year (for Nursery and Reception).
- Sending a report on their child's attainment and progress at the end of their time in the Foundation Stage.
- Developing a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between child, school and parents, including: Interactive story sessions, Phonics Funfair, personality patchwork, Mum and Grandma's Mother's Day treat, Bookstart, parents Forest School sessions, curriculum workshops, dad and granddad orienteering, garden projects, maths workshops, writing projects etc.



SAFEGUARDING AND WELFARE

Ensuring that all children in the school are safe is our top priority and 'everyone's responsibility'. We aim to educate children on boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand appropriate risks. We provide children with choices to help them develop this important life skill. Children should be allowed to take risks, but need to be taught how to evaluate hazards.

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In the EYFS we use a slightly simplified version of our whole school Blossom Code which helps us understand and demonstrate positive behaviours. These behaviours include things such as having good manners, supporting our friends and knowing how to stay safe.



At Appletree Gardens First School we understand that we are legally required to comply with certain welfare requirements as stated in the Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage. For more information, see the whole school documents on our website:

Safeguarding and Child Protection policy 2024-2025

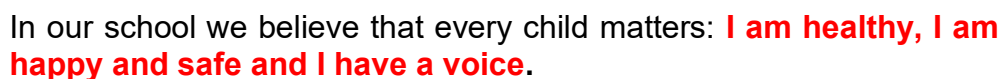
Anti-bullying policy

Prevent policy

At Appletree Gardens First School we:

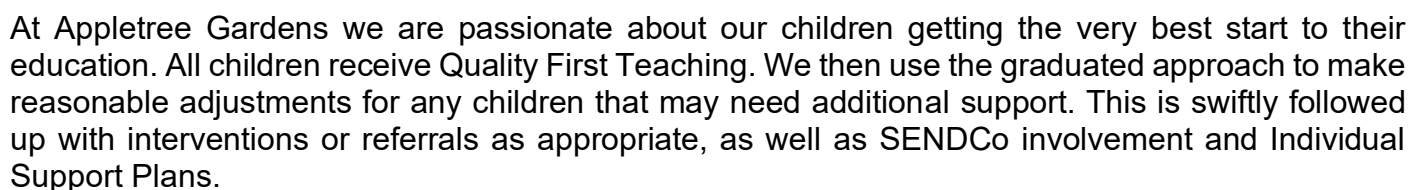
- Maintain records, policies and procedures required for safe efficient management of the setting and to meet the needs of the children.
- Promote the welfare of children.
- Promote good health, preventing the spread of infection and taking appropriate action when children are ill. See Administration of medicines policy.
- Ensure there is an appropriate first aid kit accessible at all times. Keep a written record of accidents or injuries and first aid treatment. Inform parents / carers of any accident or injury See Health and Safety Policy.
- Maintain records and obtain and share information (with parents / carers and other professionals) to ensure the needs of all children are met. All staff have access to CPOMs and it is the responsibility of all staff to record incidents in an appropriate and timely manner.
- Manage behaviour effectively in a manner appropriate for the children's stage of development and individual needs. See Behaviour policy.
- Ensure all adults who look after the children or who have unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so. See Code of conduct policy
- Ensure that the premises, furniture and equipment are safe and suitable for purpose by maintaining relevant and up to date risk assessments..
- Ensure that every child receives enjoyable and challenging learning and development experiences tailored to meet their needs.

INCLUSION



We do this by taking account of our children's range of life experiences when planning for their learning. Forming strong working relationships with our parents is crucial to support this process. We value the diversity of individuals within the school. All children at Appletree Gardens First School are treated fairly. All children and their families are valued within our school.

Appletree Gardens follows the **GRADUATED APPROACH** to robustly manage and support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The Code of Practice (2014- updated 2020) defines the graduated approach as:





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We believe **EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION** is crucial to the success of our most vulnerable learners and use a number of strategies to achieve this:

- Maximising use of the newly established North Tyneside Early Years Inclusion Service.
- Timely referrals to: SALT (Speech and Language Therapy), OT (Occupational Therapy), Chatterbox (2YO via Health Visitor), Educational Psychologist.
- Signposting parents: to Health Visitors, school nurse or GP for a range of concerns, or for hearing and vision checks / tests.
- WellComm Speech and Language Toolkit - baseline screener, activities and interventions.
- Close involvement with / support from our school SENDCo.
- Play based interventions to support communication and language skills.
- Thrive (in Reception) - Supporting some of our most vulnerable children, giving them the tools to help develop their confidence and communication skills.
- All EY staff are trained in Makaton and are using it to support communication alongside Widgit visual resources.
- Dyslexia Friendly techniques - including syllable work to support pronunciation and rhyming work to support phonological awareness.

For any children who may need additional support during transitions between year groups, we offer bespoke programmes which may include: additional meetings with parents; taking advice from external professionals; reduced timetables; making personalised photo books and offering additional visits to their new classrooms and staff.

For more detailed information on how we support children with SEND, see our [SEND policy and webpage](#).

ASSESSMENT

Baseline Assessments

We complete rigorous baseline assessments for children entering our early years provision. Little Pips assess the children in the Prime Areas only. Nursery complete a baseline assessment within the child's first half term. Reception complete a baseline within the first three weeks. We ensure these assessments are robust by moderating within school and with other schools in the cluster. We use Sonar to record the children's baseline assessments. This data works alongside contextual information we record about the children, the WellComm assessment screener, parental input and other key assessments. Reception also complete the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment.

Observation - Assessment - Planning Cycle

Early Years staff use observations as the basis for planning. Staff are skilled at observing children to identify their achievements, interests, characteristics of effective learning and next steps for learning. These observations directly influence the high quality interactions staff have with the children and they also lead the direction of the planning. The staff use the children's interests to plan activities based on the objectives in our curriculum. The curriculum is what we want our children to know - how we deliver the curriculum is directly influenced by our children. This fostering of the children's interests develops a high level of motivation for the children's learning. We make regular assessments of children's learning and we use this information to ensure that future planning reflects identified needs.

Assessment in Early Years takes the form of both formal and informal observations. Assessments are recorded termly onto Sonar. This data is then analysed and next steps are planned accordingly.



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Any gaps in the data are addressed through provision, curriculum planning and targeted interventions. Observations also directly feed into any referrals made.

2 Year Check

All children in Little Pips will have their 2 Year Check completed by their key worker, reporting their findings to parents. If there are any concerns around the child's development, this would be explained to parents and they may be signposted to relevant professionals or the health visitor.

Assessment at the End of EYFS

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile:

"The EYFS Profile provides parents and carers, practitioners and teachers with a well rounded picture of a child's knowledge, understanding and abilities, their attainment against expected levels, and their readiness for year 1. The EYFS Profile must reflect practitioners' own knowledge and professional judgement of a child. Each child's level of development must be assessed against the Early Learning Goals. Practitioners must indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are not yet reaching expected levels ('emerging')." Statutory Framework for the EYFS, October 2024.

These results are shared with parents (with an explanation) alongside their end of year report. The results are also shared with Year 1 staff as part of our transition arrangements.

We moderate assessments throughout the school year, across year groups and the key stage. All staff are involved in the assessments and moderation process. We also carry out moderation with other local schools (at least one per term) and between Reception and Year One staff. We ensure all final EYFS Profile data is carefully quality assured in alignment with EYFS guidance.

Appendix 1

Grow Your Language across Appletree Early Years

What is our language and communication offer?

Positive Relationships:

- Experienced staff who invest in building excellent relationships with our families.
- High quality interactions between staff and children.
- Individual welcome meetings at the start of the year.
- Talk Partners used in Nursery and Reception to focus on building relationships and early conversation skills.

Starting Points and On-Going Assessment:

- 2 Year checks in Little Pips.
- Baseline checks and observations to assess current skills and knowledge.
- Assessment throughout the year to ensure robust plan - do - review process.

Curriculum:

- Challenging curriculum designed to build vocabulary and language structures with carefully planned opportunities to enable children to use new vocabulary and language structures.
- Daily Story Time - emphasis on high quality texts and developing a love of reading.



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- Core texts - books and Nursery Rhymes the children will read and revisit until they know them very well.
- Key vocabulary mapped out across the key stage - systematically revisiting and embedding new vocabulary. This includes foundation subject specific vocabulary.
- Foundation Phonics in Little Pips and Nursery (pre synthetic phonics) - focus on speaking, listening and communication skills.
- Forest School - introducing new vocabulary and providing opportunities to practise and embed it.
- Dough Disco and Squiggle Whilst You Wiggle - practising positional and directional language.
- Talk for Writing - helping the children learn stories (Imitation stage) and then use language and vocabulary creatively (Innovation stage).
- Drawing Club - exploring new vocabulary linked to current stories.
- Cookery Sessions.
- JIGSAW - PSHE Scheme of Work.
- Preparing children for the next stage in their learning, starting with strong Communication and Language skills.



EY Environment - Facilitating the Curriculum:

- Language rich environment - all staff observe, listen and talk to the children with a rich vocabulary.
- Routines - understanding and following instructions, supported with Widgit visuals and Makaton actions.
- Carefully planned learning environments with enhancements to embrace children's interests and spark their curiosity.

Supporting Vulnerable Learners - Early Identification, Actions and Interventions:

- WellComm Speech and Language Toolkit - baseline screener with activities to support the curriculum for all children and specific interventions for those who need additional support. WellComm provides children with a level which means progress can be closely monitored.
- Early identification of additional needs around speech, language and communication. Including referrals to: SALT (any time), EY Inclusion Service, Chatterbox (2YO - any time via Health Visitor).
- Close involvement with / support from SENDCO.
- Donut Planning for *Speaking* - Simple visual format to plot the children who are confident speakers and those who need support in this area. This information is then used by all staff to inform play based, high quality interactions with a language focus.
- Thrive (Reception) - Supporting some of our most vulnerable children, giving them the tools to help develop their confidence and communication skills.
- All EY staff are trained in Makaton and are using it to support communication.
- Dyslexia Friendly techniques - including syllable work to support pronunciation and rhyming work to support phonological awareness.
- Launchpad for Literacy - Systematic approach to identify and close specific speech and language gaps with individuals and vulnerable groups.

Parents as Partners:

- Developing strong relationships with our parents is one of our highest priorities and essential to building the strongest possible picture of each child.



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- Formal welcome meetings and Stay and Play sessions before the children start in Little Pips, Nursery or Reception to start building the picture of the children and better understand their language levels.
- Individual welcome meetings at the start of the year - more informal chance for parents to discuss concerns and ask questions before their child starts.
- Stay and Play Sessions and Workshops - Supporting children with their learning.
- Promoting a Love of Reading - Sending books home: Library books in Reception, Story Sacks in Nursery, Busy Bags in Little Pips.
- Extra support for parents of vulnerable learners - Clear communication about expectations and any referrals, signposting to appropriate services where appropriate.

[Strong foundations in the first years of school - GOV.UK](#)

The curriculum sets out the path to proficiency in the subject, while good assessments check that children are firmly on that path and that they stay on it.

Both [play-based learning](#) and direct instruction have value for teaching young children, but considering which is better suited to a particular form of knowledge is crucial. It is also important to think about how best children can learn what is intended.