



# EYFS Policy

## Vision Statement

We aim to create a safe, happy and nurturing environment for all our children!

## Mission Statement

The Orchard School strives to provide the best quality teaching and learning with an inclusive and personalised curriculum, where all achievements are celebrated.



Approved by Governors on: 9.6.23

Signed by Chair of Governors:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Findlay', written over a white background.

Head Teacher: Amy Findlay

Date of Review: Summer 2025

## **Introduction**

Children in the Lower School Department at The Orchard School (which includes Early Years Pupils) have a wide range of educational needs including physical disabilities, severe learning difficulties, complex learning difficulties, sensory impairments or a combination of some or all of these.

Children are admitted with an EHCP naming the Orchard school as their provision, and although we welcome pupils from nursery, our intake also includes pupils who are reception and year 1/year 2. Pupils will come to us from a range of settings across the local authority and occasionally from outside the local authority. Most pupils will remain at The Orchard School throughout their primary education.

Occasionally children join us who have life limiting conditions. In such cases the school works closely with the family and relevant care providers in providing the best possible education and care for their child.

All of the content taught within Early Years/Lower School continues through the whole school. The Framework of Intent is consistent across all classes. Staff ensure a total communication approach is used allowing all children to develop their early communication skills. The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning underpin all teachers planning of lessons and facilitating, modelling and providing resources for the next steps of learning to further deepen, embed and extend children's learning. Staff are supported to make careful observation(s) to learn about each child as an individual, discuss and share barriers to learning, particular likes or fascinations that enable children to succeed in becoming more confident, secure, motivated and thriving individuals.

We teach and facilitate children's learning within small groups, 1:1 learning and some whole class teaching, using a variety of methods and techniques in a range of specialist rooms using specific training knowledge. Some examples are; Intensive Interaction, Music for Interaction, Sherborne movement, Rebound Therapy, PECS, TAC PAC and musical maths.

## **The Early Years Pupils/Lower School Department**

Over recent years our Early Years population has significantly reduced, so Early Years pupils are placed within our Lower School department, which currently consists of five classes with additional learning areas. There is a Creative room to support the teaching of EAD, baking, cooking and messy play. There is an observation room for use with individuals for music therapy, massage sessions, 1:1 work, as a time out room and for children's parents/carers and professionals to observe sessions. There is also a dark room (the Moonlight room) that can be used for visual assessments and visual skill training. There is eye gaze equipment allowing pupils to access technology on the screen using their eyes.

The Lower School department has its own purpose built play areas accessible from each classroom to facilitate outdoor education and play skills. Each child also has access to the sensory garden and specially adapted playground equipment in the quadrangle and in the garden area. In addition, Early Years pupils and the rest of lower school have access to a soft play room, Sensory room (rainbow room), dance and drama studio, library, dark room

(moonlight room), sensory integration room, PE hall and swimming pool which are located in the main body of the school.

The Lower School department is managed by the Head of Lower School and we also have an EYFS Leader, who is responsible for the EYFS children within Lower School. Each class has a teacher and at least 3 support staff. Health care assistants work closely with the class teams and the Children's Community Nursing team in supporting children who are fed via a gastrostomy or NG tube or have additional health needs. In addition to this there are a number of our pupils who receive continuing care from health professionals, and although not employed by the school, these carers will be in class with their nominated children.

Children are usually grouped by individual needs and abilities to enable the class to function at its best. Sometimes children commence at The Orchard School during the school year and sometimes behaviour or vulnerability needs change meaning they need to move classes within the year. This is always done in consultation with parents.

Children can start at the age of two and a half years on a part time basis and are usually only offered a full time place at the age of three. All children are full time by their fifth birthday unless there is a medical reason for this to be delayed.

For some children with poor health or recovering from a period of hospitalisation a shortened day can be arranged with the head teacher subject to medical advice. For others a phased return to school can be arranged.

### **Admission (please also refer to Admissions Policy)**

Initial contact with the school is managed by the local authority and any enquiries need to be made through them. They will organise and invite parents and their children to make an initial visit to the school where they will meet a member of the Senior Management Team and tour the school.

Once parents are offered a place at The Orchard School following statutory consultation, a visit to the child's home and to any pre-school setting they attend are made by the class teacher or team as part of the transition process. This visit will only take place once the placement has been agreed by the LA Special Educational Needs Department and accepted by the family.

The purpose of these home visits is to provide an opportunity for parents to ask any further questions they have about the school and for the school to reassure parents regarding their child's start to school. During this visit parents are given the admission forms, which need to be completed prior to admission and also letters/ forms requesting permission for swimming, photographs etc.

Parents and carers are also given a welcome booklet with staff names and general information about their child's class.

Parents are encouraged and supported to complete an 'All about Me' booklet. This is a valuable document as it provides class staff with information about the child, such as their likes and dislikes. This helps identify with the family areas that may be focuses for their learning.

Prior to admission, the child may sometimes receive another visit by a member of the class team and where appropriate, the child and family are invited into school on an informal basis prior to the start date. The school also hosts a garden party in the summer term where new parents and pupils for the forthcoming year can meet staff and parents of those pupils currently in Lower School. A member of the preschool team is often there to support parents. We recognise however that each family and each child have individual needs and admission arrangements may change in order to meet these needs.

The handing over of information from previous settings will also take place in the summer term and the class teacher and multiagency staff based at the Orchard school will attend a handover meeting as appropriate at the school along with a representative from the child's current educational setting.

Throughout all the transition process, handover and sharing of safeguarding information is crucial in addition to discussions about a child's home life and current educational provision. Staff members consider this within professional handover meetings, setting visits and on home visits. The Designated Safeguarding Lead also makes contact with all previous settings/pre school EY teams to ensure safeguarding information is shared.

During discussions with the family, if there are children living with parents who do not live together or there are other family members in the household, staff will discuss how to share information with those non-resident members and seek information about other family members.

## **Foundation Stage Philosophy**

The Lower School department (which includes Early Years) at The Orchard School believes that early childhood should be a time of play and opportunities allowing children to explore and experiment with the world around them. Through these opportunities children will make discoveries and acquire new skills and knowledge about their world.

We recognise that for some children there are many additional challenges that affect their ability to play and learn and that by providing an access to a broad and balanced curriculum, that includes an adapted Foundation Stage Curriculum, we can suitably modify, take account of individual health and learning difficulties, and remove the barriers to learning.

Each unique child has individualised and differentiated learning which is assessed and monitored on an ongoing basis through the child's time at school. Throughout the year information is shared with parents about progress and next steps for learning and development. These are formally reported through the EHCP Annual review process.

The Foundation Stage Curriculum document contains three **Prime Areas of Learning**;

- **Personal Social and Emotional Development** (Managing Self, Self-Regulation, Building Relationships).
- **Physical Development** (Gross Motor, Fine Motor)
- **Communication and Language** (Listening and Attention Understanding and Speaking).

and four **Specific areas of Learning**;

- **Mathematics** (Numerical Patterns, Shape, space and measure).
- **Understanding the World** (Past and Present, The Natural World, People, Culture and Communities)
- **Expressive Arts and Design** (Creating with materials, Being Imaginative and Expressive)
- **Literacy** (Comprehension, Word reading, writing)

Children need a learning environment that promotes the development of attention and concentration skills, and that reflects normal childhood experience. This needs a skilled classroom team who are able to support access to these activities.

The Lower School department is a bright, colourful, well-planned and busy environment that encourages and supports the children in developing confidence, skills, attitudes and an understanding that will help them to play an active part in their learning and in their family.

### **Learning and Teaching in the Foundation Stage**

We believe that children need a high staffing ratio in order to learn and fulfil their potential. They need opportunities to work on a 1:1 basis for many of their individual targets and these sessions are often for short burst periods of time.

All children have support from a suitably experienced and skilled classroom team, who are able to modify the learning experiences and ensure access to activities and experiences offered. This includes access to an environment where augmentative communication strategies are in place.

The children in Early Years and the rest of Lower School have access to materials and equipment that are stimulating, motivating, attractive and suitably adapted to meet their needs and interests. Children's individual interests and their characteristics of effective teaching and learning (CoETL) are what underpin learning.

### **Outdoor Education (Please refer to Outdoor Education Policy)**

At the Orchard School, we believe that learning through outdoor play is an important part of all children's development. It is an integral part of the early years provision and we believe that it should be available to all the children who attend the Orchard School regardless of the complexities of their learning and health difficulties.

All children have the right to experience and enjoy the special nature of being outdoors. Central to this learning opportunity is knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff who can help unlock the potential of learning outdoors. We believe that all children need a well-organised and safe outdoor environment to learn.

Outdoor education provides opportunities to explore, move and challenge children. It should be a flexible, dynamic and versatile space where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play.

The Lower School department (which includes our Early Years contingent) aims to provide and develop an outdoor environment where space is used effectively and opportunities are given so that the children are challenged to explore. When children are very poorly their health needs will be considered with the parents and children's community nurses.

Care must be taken to provide opportunities for the more vulnerable children to play outdoors as well as their more energetic peers. This is managed through careful timetabling and a high staffing ratio and through the development of a secure physical space, which allows them to explore more freely alongside their peers.

A number of staff from within the department take responsibility for overseeing outdoor education. It is a challenging and flexible area and takes into consideration seasonal stimuli and cross curriculum links.

- **Break times:** These are planned and monitored by individual class teams as classes tend to stagger their break times. Staff ensure a range of activities and opportunities are provided for the children over break time. These reflect the relative short amount of time the children are outside for (15 mins) and the staff available to supervise and play with the children. Break times are at a set time to enable pupils to learn about routines, different behaviours and to make sense of the times of the day.
- **Dinnertimes:** The Midday play leaders in consultation with the teacher responsible for outdoor education plan dinnertime activities. Again these activities are varied and reflect the staffing ratio available. There is a plan in place to ensure that a range of activities takes place.
- **Weekly timetabled sessions:** These are encouraged to be taught outdoors and may include art, storytelling, water play etc. This may be a planned activity with intended outcomes, or targets, or a holding play activity for a small group.
- **Unplanned sessions:** These sessions allow staff to be flexible in their planning and play provision. For example, responding to a rain or snow shower. Such sessions will be supported by weather boxes which will be maintained by Lower School staff.

## **Role of the adult**

The role of the adult in facilitating activities and ensuring safe challenging activities is crucial to the success of outdoor education at The Orchard School.

Staff ensure that equipment is safe and appropriate and a range of activities are offered to the children they are responsible for. They are responsible for ensuring that the children are dressed appropriately for the weather and activities undertaken.

The Lower School department works on a team approach; all staff within each class group work with all the children in the class over the course of the timetable. The key worker for each child is the class teacher and they will oversee the teaching, learning and assessment including parental communication for all children within the class. However support staff within classes have responsibilities such as completing the child's learning journey, resourcing particular communication books and supporting personal care needs of specific children. Often the support staff discuss concerns or areas of development and praise with parents which helps promote a team dialogue between school and home; rather than this always being the class teacher.

All staff involved in supporting teaching and learning are crucial. Staff have detailed knowledge of each child through careful observations that are shared within the class team. They know children's likes, dislikes, how children learn and how to facilitate children's next steps as well as deepening, extending and strengthening each child's learning.

## **Monitoring**

The monitoring of this area is done by the Early Years Leader, Subject Leaders and Head Teacher.

All staff have responsibility when monitoring the safety of the children and the wear and tear of the equipment to ensure that children can play safely.

The children's progress and involvement in activities will be monitored and recorded by the class teams through their cross curricular planning and on Evidence for Learning which is an electronic assessment and evidence gathering tool.

## **Multi-agency working**

The children in Early Years have regular access to and monitoring by a range of support staff to ensure their unique needs are met. Depending on the needs of the child these may include Children's Community nurses, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Teachers of the Deaf and Visually Impaired, Educational and Clinical Psychologists.

It is our belief that by providing a shared, informed, and co-ordinated approach to the child's unique EHCP we can support the child and their family in the most effective and supportive way.

The multi-agency team will continue to work closely with the class staff and child throughout the child's education.

The Lower School staff team has opportunities to work alongside support services in delivering the specific programs devised by them. These may include physiotherapy, communication or feeding programs or visual skill training.

## **Family involvement and community links**

Everyone working with our Early Years pupils and the rest of Lower School is committed to providing an environment that actively promotes families as partners in the education of their child. This can only be implemented through regular informed contact with families through home visits, diaries, reports, e-mails, teams meetings, parents evening etc. This naturally includes regular positive feedback about their child's progress and achievements.

Parents are actively encouraged to become involved in the education of their child. Home school diaries are written daily, telephone calls, coffee and activity mornings and parent training are offered.

All children have Home Learning activities sent each half term, these are individual to class groups and more individual plans can be sent. There are home learning activities/videos on the school website which are delivered identical to school, these also allow parents to see how lessons are taught.

Parent's evenings are held twice a year in addition to the annual EHCP Review meeting. Families have the opportunity to visit school and talk to staff at any point in the school year. They are also supported through home visits etc from the support services.

The department positively promotes the involvement of the wider family, siblings and friends of the child and encourages them into school on a social basis.

All children are encouraged to meet the wider community through visits to places such as the Snaps playground, Ash end farm, the Sea life centre, local shops and visiting local playgrounds and parks. We also encourage visits from relevant groups such as Zoo lab, Musicians, Pets at Home. UV Groovy puppet show and Animal antics.

We have links with some local nurseries and schools and when appropriate, partnerships are developed in order to establish opportunities for children to join us for play groups and other relevant social opportunities.

### **Play and the broader Curriculum**

The Orchard School believes that play has an important role in learning, practicing and developing new skills and in the therapeutic effect that play has for children.

Play skills are incorporated throughout the curriculum documents and discreet play sessions are taught throughout the department to expand the play opportunities the children have. These may include imaginary, exploratory or discovery play. Opportunities for Tac Pac, massage, dance massage, Cooking, Dance and physical play area also provided.

Staff are encouraged to support children through these play experiences and be responsive to child-initiated play.

### **Personal Social and Emotional Development and Dispositions for Learning**

The Orchard School's Early Years provision recognises that Personal and Social development and Emotional well-being are central to the successful development of all the other areas of development.

Children's health and self-confidence is of paramount importance in their ability to learn and by working with the families and multi-agency staff, we strive to compensate for the additional and sometimes unique complex needs of these children. Recognising their age and physical and emotional health in developing their programs and are reflected in their feeding, behaviour and care programs where appropriate.

We aim to provide an environment with a consistent daily routine within which children feel safe and secure. This enables children to develop their emotional skills to manage their behaviour, learn about routines and boundaries and feel more settled and confident. Behaviour support programmes are shared with parents and parents are often signposted to additional support for behaviour support when needed. We are able to refer children to CAMHS when needed. We know and understand that the more emotionally secure and settled a child is; both at home and school, then they will be able to learn much more effectively, feel happier and be more confident in their everyday life.

Children's oral health is promoted through dentist workshops, on-going discussion with families regarding specialist dentists and integrating this into the curriculum.

All families are sent the sleep policy, included is a sleep profile, this supports safe sleep when children sleep at school. (Please refer to sleep policy).



## **Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Special Educational Needs**

**Equal opportunities** (Please also see the Equal Opportunities Policy)

Children are provided with challenging and interesting activities differentiated to their specific abilities and needs.

Discrimination in any form will be challenged and stereotyping avoided. The differences between children's needs, cultural and religious backgrounds provide us with an opportunity to enrich pupils' learning experiences through play materials, stories and rhymes, music and images and celebrations. These are intrinsic to the Early Years Curriculum and philosophy of the Foundation Stage at the Orchard School and are woven through all aspects of the work we do.

### **Inclusion**

Pupils at the Orchard School are supported to take part in inclusion activities within local Nursery or mainstream primary school settings if their abilities are such that this is appropriate. Occasionally there may be the possibility for children to be supported in mainstream settings with the view transfer to mainstream provision. This decision is taken on an individual basis and in conjunction with families and is based on pupils' needs and capabilities.

### **Contexts for learning**

All young children learn in a holistic way. Although our curriculum may have a particular focus for some lessons, areas such as communication and language, personal and social development and physical development will be supported across all aspects of the day and throughout the daily routines.

Learning occurs through a balance of child and adult initiated activities. The balance of areas may vary from session to session or even within a single session. We value and respect child initiated learning and this should not be thought of only in terms of acquiring new skills and knowledge. Progression for all children is both vertical, increasing abilities in particular skills and lateral, increasing the ability to learn in a range of different settings and with different materials, adults and children.

Learning is not only intellectual, as a child learns across a range of contexts they will develop physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Children's unique abilities, interests and motivation (CoETL) provide us with starting points for our teaching. We value the insight the family can give us into their children, not only at the initial assessment phase but also throughout their child's time in school.

All staff working with Early Years pupils and across the department strive to provide materials and activities that are based on the child's everyday experiences and are meaningful to them.

### **Fundamental British Values**

Staff promote British Values throughout all aspects of the curriculum (See British values document for detailed information regarding what this looks like for children at The Orchard School). All staff promote decision making, sharing of equipment, toys and time, supporting children to learn what is right and wrong as well as respecting, tolerating and engaging with a diverse range of people. These are taught within everyday situations as they occur, throughout sessions such as understanding of the world and throughout a diverse range of celebrations and events as they occur throughout the year.

## **Teaching and learning styles**

All children learn in different ways and this will vary with the child's health and age. The ways in which the child engages with other people and their environment – playing and exploring, active learning, and creating, thinking critically all underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. The unique child reaches out to relate to people and things through the **Characteristics of Effective Teaching Learning (CoETL)** which move through all areas of learning, playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically.

Staff working with Early Years pupils and within Lower School as a whole work in collaboration with the multiagency team identify the individual learning styles of the children they teach and adapt their teaching style to meet their needs. These are described in their unique CoETL and within their EHCP. These characteristics of effective learning will naturally change over the school year and over each child's unique learning journey.

All children need to learn through active, first hand experiences that can be repeated to enable the consolidation of ideas and concepts.

## **Independence**

Children in the department are encouraged wherever possible to do things for themselves.

Children are encouraged to make choices and decisions wherever possible, they are supported to do so by the use of real objects, objects of reference, gestures, signing, symbols, photos and speech.

Underlying all aspects of the curriculum is the promotion of independence and self-help skills. These skills are evidenced and assessed within our curriculum documents.

## **Continuity and progression**

Class and departmental meetings facilitate their development and provide opportunities to discuss aspects of the child's development and formulate behaviour/care plans that can be shared amongst staff.

The ability of the staff to work as part of a team in addition to their range of skills is central to providing continuity to the children during their Early Years' experience.

The Orchard Framework of Intent is taught across school from Early Years through to Year 6, enabling a seamless transition through the key stages.

The Orchard curriculum is a personalised and developmental curriculum that follows the philosophy and pedagogy of Early Years education. Each subject area works towards the

Early Learning Goals (ELG) and beyond with additional content that we feel is important for our pupils at Orchard. Communication is at the heart of our curriculum and is promoted throughout all the curriculum.

Each subject leader monitors the planning, teaching and learning of all children across school from EYFS to Year 6, ensuring meeting all requirements are met for statutory content for those pupils in the Early Years Foundation stage.

## **Transition through the School**

Early Years – aged pupils may stay in the Lower School Department with the same teacher for more than one year. However, if they will be moving classes within the department or moving to another school department, pupils will have a visit from their new teacher during the half term prior to the move. Information is shared between the teachers and class staff at a class planning transition meeting. Staff within the Orchard school, whether they teach Early Years pupils or not share a common assessment tool, Evidence for Learning and this is moderated and reviewed by curriculum leaders and the Assessment co-ordinators at staff meetings.

The Heads of Lower School and Middle School also have a handover meeting to talk about the involvement of any agencies such as Social services etc. The Designated Safeguarding Lead and the pastoral team work across the school therefore they support when children are with a new class team.

## **Baseline and Assessment recording and reporting**

(please see Assessment Recording and Reporting policy)

Baseline assessment at the Orchard School occurs over the first half term following admission. Children are assessed on the school's Early Years Assessment Document and using Evidence for Learning. This is carried out as a whole team approach with on-going conversations with family and the multi agency team.

Reception Baseline assessment is now a statutory requirement, using an on-line portal. Children who we believe are able to carry out all or part of the assessments with adapted materials will undertake the test. All staff have had baseline assessment training. The Head Teacher in discussion with the Assessment Co-ordinator and the EYFS Lead will disapply those children who it is not appropriate for.

Children's information is entered onto the assessment tool throughout the school year. We recognise that children will make progress across areas not being specifically taught through their subject targets and these achievements will be noted. These records are then used to set future programmes of work for the pupil.

Progression in Early Years is evaluated and measured through staff observations, CoETL, Evidence For Learning, engagement profile and EHCP reviews. These are regularly shared with parents. (Please see Assessment Recording and Reporting policy.) This is collated at the end of the Reception year and used to form the child's Foundation Stage Profile.

This is shared with the child's family at the parents evening at the end of Reception year along with our achievement board comments, diaries and through the annual review/EHCP review.

## **Monitoring Evaluation and review**

The curriculum leaders monitor the planning, Characteristics of Effective Learning, learning journeys and recording for children within EYFS and whole school. Subject leaders and SLT will monitor the teaching and learning throughout the department and in line with the schools Monitoring Policy.

Pupil Progress Review exercises are completed throughout the year with class teachers to discuss any difficulties and monitor record keeping. Where appropriate, intervention plans are created to support further progress for pupils.

The curriculum is reviewed by the Subject Leaders in accordance with the Early Years and School Development Plans.

Class and department meetings are held to review and revise; planning, timetables, groupings and routines. All staff have a responsibility to identify areas that need reviewing and are expected to contribute to planning meetings.

The Head teacher, Governors and the LA, also monitor the Early Years provision.

Good work and achievement are celebrated and shared with children and their families through good work stamps, certificates, assemblies and through the Home School diaries. (Please see Rewards Policy).

An end of year assembly also celebrates the achievement of children and is shared with the whole school and their families.

## **Staff development**

All staff in the department are responsible for identifying their own professional development needs in line with the schools policy on professional development. All staff have a professional development interview / performance management interview in the course of the academic year.

Reviewed and updated April 2017 Laura Valentine

Reviewed and updated February 2020 Chris Hunstone

Reviewed and updated July 2021 Laura Valentine

Reviewed and updated June 2023 Emma Bowers

*To be reviewed biannually*