



Forest Alliance
of Nursery Schools

Teaching & Learning policy

Status: non-statutory

Responsible governors: Children's learning & development committee

Last review date: Summer 2026

Date of next review: Summer 2027

The policy is available for staff at: School offices and shared drive

And for parents/carers at: School website

Policy audit

Version, revision date, who revised, section revised

V1 new policy combining current practice, Curricular Aspirations, and new values, Alison Emmett used Gemini AI to revise all.

“Early childhood is a period of momentous significance for people growing up in our culture. By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, as language users and they will have reached certain decisions about their own abilities and their own worth” Margaret Donaldson

Our Philosophy & Approach

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) covers one of the most important stages in a child's life, when brains and bodies develop rapidly. High-quality early education makes a lifelong difference to how children learn, communicate, and value themselves.

At Church Hill and Low Hall Nursery Schools, we believe every child deserves this high-quality start. Our staff put this policy into

practice so that every child can become an independent learner, equipped to make informed choices and thrive in the world.

Learning thrives when children feel a sense of wellbeing and self-worth. We build on what each child can already do, teaching them how to get along, learn together, and belong to our school community. We nurture positive thinking and learning patterns to help them become lifelong learners and curious, tolerant individuals.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning

We lay these firm foundations by focusing on three key characteristics:

1. **Playing and exploring:** Playing together and being willing to 'have a go'.
2. **Active learning:** Staying involved, concentrating, persevering, and enjoying new challenges.
3. **Creating and thinking critically:** Using imagination and thinking skills to make connections and find creative solutions. We embed Tales Toolkit to scaffold imaginative storytelling, resolve conflicts, and foster a deep love of reading.

To support this, our adults tune into children as they play. We listen respectfully to their ideas, cultivate their natural curiosity, and build on their unique fascinations.

Our Curricular Aspirations

We plan and provide a comprehensive curriculum that combines this approach with all areas of the statutory EYFS

framework. Rather than just tracking standard tick-boxes, we use our own bespoke Curricular Aspirations to map out what children need to learn before they leave us, helping them become confident, resilient, communicative friends.

Our curriculum adapts to meet the needs of all learners:

- For 2-year-olds: 4 core aspirations based on the Prime Areas of learning.
- For 3 and 4-year-olds: 8 core aspirations based on both the Prime and Specific Areas.
- Inclusive pathways: We explicitly map out non-speaking responses to our aspirations so every child can demonstrate their understanding.

Curriculum Launch

September 2021: Created our first set of "Curricular Goals" inspired by the national Development Matters framework.

First Publication

November 2022: Published the 4th version of our goals in book form for the staff team after a year of testing in practice.

Neurodiversity Upgrades

2025 – 2026: Updated our terminology from "Goals" to Aspirations and "Milestones" to Insights. Inspired by the Neurodiversity Affirming Early Childhood Collective (2025), we redesigned our layouts to celebrate diverse play patterns and represent autistic play pathways.

1. All Children First

Every child has the right to play, learn, and be listened to. We celebrate each child's individuality and needs. We meet all children exactly where they are. We support them to reach their full potential as confident, capable learners, as thriving humans.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, we:

- Employ experienced, qualified staff who assess, plan, and support children to learn in ways that suit them best.
- Provide welcoming, secure, and stimulating nurseries where all children feel included and confident to take part.
- Offer varied, fascinating play opportunities indoors and outdoors, including a wide variety of trips.
- Provide space, time, and expert support so every child can develop self-esteem, independence, and a unique voice.
- Track and adapt learning through regular observations and discussions, ensuring we shape our teaching around each child's unique strengths, interests, and developmental path.

2. All Families Matter

Parents and carers are the expert in their child. They are their child's first and most important teachers. When any child joins our school, so does their family. We work together and the children thrive.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, we:

- Observe together how your child plays, explores, communicates, and interacts, building this unique picture in their Special Book.
- Share insights about new learning and progress through Class Dojo. We encourage parents to upload 'wow' moments from home so staff can build a complete picture and plan activities that extend the child's development.
- Encourage parents to take part in learning alongside their child at school and support home-based learning.
- Arrange key person meetings twice a year to discuss progress, plus a final meeting at the end of the school year to share the end-of-year report.
- Provide direct access to the key person or SENDco if parents have any concerns about their child's development.
- Offer parent workshops throughout the year—either via Zoom or in person—covering early years teaching, phonics, literacy, and the wider curriculum.
- Consult parents and carers on the quality of education through initiatives like our Listening Week.

3. A Community of Communities

We are a proud part of our diverse community of communities. We designed our curriculum for the children and families of this area. We share our expertise across Waltham Forest and beyond. Everyone benefits.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, we:

- Organise community events such as International Day, coffee mornings, and children's performances.
- Share our practice by training local groups through the local authority Systems Leadership Training package.
- Work within early learning networks, particularly the East London Early Years and Schools Partnership (ELEYSP), to develop early childhood education.

4. Experts Working Together

Our nursery is a centre of excellence. Our staff are early years specialists. We team up with other professionals to give children the very best support.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, leaders, staff, and governors:

- Develop professional expertise through continuous training, keeping up to date with national initiatives and early childhood research.
- Use the national Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework to plan learning, using daily assessments and parent feedback to change room layouts and resource our spaces.
- Embed Tales Toolkit across our teams to develop children's storytelling language, imagination, and a lifelong love of reading.
- Monitor teaching quality using learning walks, peer observations, and formal scales like ITERS, ECERS, and SSTEWS.
- Protect leadership time so senior staff can lead curriculum planning, environmental checks, and collaborative teamwork.
- Build strong partnerships with Family Hubs, local early years settings, and primary schools—including the West Walthamstow Partnership (WWP)—to ensure smooth transitions.
- Provide early intervention by working closely with speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, physiotherapists, specialist teachers, health visitors, social care, and 'Early Help'.

5. Kindness, Respect, and Equity

We value kindness, friendship, and respect. We work to be equitable. We teach children to care for themselves, each other, and the world around them.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, we:

- Provide resources and teaching that actively celebrate diverse cultures, languages, and family structures, helping children build empathy and lasting friendships.
- Challenge discriminatory behaviour, language, and attitudes immediately.
- Use Tales Toolkit to model problem-solving and conflict resolution, teaching children to respect each other's rights during play.
- Empower children to express themselves clearly when they feel unsafe or unhappy.
- Run Forest School sessions at both nurseries (led by an EYP at Church Hill on Mondays, and by our Assistant Headteacher at Low Hall on Thursdays). Every 3 and 4-year-old completes a six-week block by the end of the year, with extended experience for children from lower-income families to build resilience, teamwork, and kindness to nature.

6. A Warm Welcome for Every Child

Our thoughtful settling in process helps children feel comfortable and supported from day one. When a child feels they belong, they learn beautifully. They grow strong. When it's time to leave, they are ready.

Our Policy

To fulfil this value, we:

- Invite parents to weekly stay-and-play sessions, a dedicated 'Visiting Day', and three transition visits before the child officially starts.
- Use a key person system so each family has a dedicated staff member. This special relationship begins during nursery visits and home visits.
- Encourage parents to stay until their child settles, ensuring a positive start to every day.
- Learn key words in the child's community language to connect with the family and support the child as they begin learning English.
- Encourage parents to keep their community language alive at home, which strengthens the child's overall language development.

Compliance & Accountability

Legal Framework

This policy complies fully with current national legislation and the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Our curriculum seamlessly blends the 7 statutory areas of learning with our own school priorities: play, active learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and sustainability.

Rigorous & Fair Assessment

We ensure our assessment practice is accurate, consistent, and meaningful. Our staff use day-to-day observations, data analysis, and family feedback to map where children sit within our Curricular Aspiration Insights. Every assessment leads to direct action—either planning a child's next developmental step or triggering specialist early intervention.

Monitoring & Annual Review

To maintain our high standards, the Executive Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team continually monitor the quality of teaching and assessment through:

- Regular Learning Walks and peer observations.
- Formal environmental and wellbeing checks (ECERS and SSTEWS metrics).
- Collaborative "Book Looks" to review children's Special Books and ensure their individual characteristics of effective learning are well captured.
- External evaluations alongside our School Improvement Partner and Governors.

We review and adapt this policy annually to ensure it reflects the latest national legislation and local community priorities.

Read [the Early Years Foundation Stage Development Matters via this link.](#)

Keys to other school policies

- Different but Equal, Inclusion, Equality, and SEND
- Behaviour Policy: Getting Along Together,
- Safeguarding Policy
- Admissions and Transitions
- Complaints policy and procedures

Contact Information

Helen Currie leads on assessment and sustainability.

At Low Hall, Nalinee Sabaroche leads on SEND and teaching and learning

Church Hill Pat English leads on SEND.

Lindsay Read leads on curriculum across both schools.

Lindsay Read collates the planning at both schools. Lindsay also leads on e-learning which we use to share play ideas, communicate with parents, and offer curriculum if the school closes in an emergency, such as a pandemic or extreme weather.

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