



Drybrook School Early Years Curriculum Overview



Our curriculum is motivating, inclusive and responsive. We are committed to child-led, open-ended play, providing children with the space and freedom to explore, create, and make connections in their own learning. Our resources are organised so that all children can access them independently. We provide children with a safe and stimulating learning environment, fostering respect, kindness, confidence, resilience, and curiosity as life-long learners. Our curriculum aims to develop children's executive function, understanding that *'well-developed executive function leads to better educational attainment as well as a healthier life.'* (Best start in life document – Nov 2022 – Gov.uk)

Children take part in key experiences at Drybrook Early Years.

These experiences include:

- Expressing emotions every day through our emotion board
- Understanding a growth mindset through daily conversations and our **Jigsaw** programme
- A varied range of books from picture, fiction, and non-fiction
- Telling their own stories through the '**Helicopter Stories**' approach
- Learning about their community through visits out and visitors in
- Gaining confidence in water and learning the basic skills of swimming (Reception)
- Experiencing and learning a different language other than English (Spanish)
- Being outdoors in the natural environment through **Forest School**
- Learning how to cook and prepare a range of dishes (mathematics, fine motor, literacy, and healthy eating)
- Becoming confident problem solvers in mathematics by experiencing problems in a positive way through adult modelling and a love of learning.

Cultural Capital and closing the disadvantage gap

At Drybrook, we aim to provide a curriculum that breaks down cycles of disadvantage, opens possibilities for all, and levels the playing field. Educational and social development are complementary and equally important, so on a daily basis, 'sustained shared thinking' and high-quality interactions take place during child-initiated time (choosing time). Consequently, this widens children's vocabulary and extends children's thinking. We also develop independence through a 'you can do it' approach to learning (The Characteristics of Effective Learning). We identify children who need additional support early in order to ensure that they thrive. We can offer a writing support group, "**language for thinking**" program, **Anna Freud** materials (see below), 1:1 focus phonics and additional reading time with Year 5 children (Reception). We are fortunate to have students from Dene Magna and Gloucestershire College specialising in Early Years. The students carry out additional small groups with children who need it the most.

A collaboration with Parents/ Carers

We know that involving parents and carers in their child's learning has a positive impact. Our Early Years team establishes strong connections with children and their families. We use an online learning diary, **Tapestry**, to record and share children's learning and for parents to share learning at home. **Dojo** is used as a communication tool for weekly learning in class, home learning, and for achievement recognition. Parents are invited in every morning for a 10-minute stay and play where the class teacher is available (Reception). There is also a parent evening three times a year. Nursery adopts an open-door policy.

Our curriculum is inclusive

Inclusive practice is at the heart of everything we do from the day-to-day decisions we make to daily conversations with children. We ensure that all children thrive and are recognised for their strengths. We believe that we should make our experiences accessible to all. Children's well-being and mental health is the most important thing and we need to get this right in the Early Years. Research tells us that if a child is struggling due to a number of factors, then they will not be able to learn any curriculum area. We refer to the resources from the **Anna Freud Centre** (<https://www.annafreud.org/>) to support us in our daily practice and decisions.

Inclusiveness is the outcome of the process of inclusion.

- That means that inclusion uses diversity as a resource to enhance inclusiveness.
- Inclusiveness is also the ability of a community to include all its members and avoid excluding any of them.
- It thus further means the integration of all members in systems, decision-making processes and actions (Talmage, 2017).

Research-led approach

Adults stay current in their thinking by being members of Early Years forums and groups, accessing training through the National College website, and through professional, reflective discussions at team meetings.

Learning and Development

The Characteristics of Effective Learning

We see the Characteristics of Effective Learning as playing a vital role in how children learn. We believe that by supporting children to understand the learning process, they will grow into creative and adventurous learners. We promote and nurture these 'learning to learn' skills:

- **Playing and exploring** – children investigate and experience things and 'have a go.'
- **Active learning** – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties and enjoy achievements.
- **Creating and thinking critically** – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

We follow the educational programs set out in the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework** and cover the seven areas of learning, including three 'prime areas' that are 'particularly important for building a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships, and thriving':

- **Communication and language**
- **Personal, social, and emotional development**
- **Physical development**

Additionally, four specific areas through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied:

- **Literacy**
- **Mathematics**
- **Understanding the world**
- **Expressive arts and design**

Communication and Language (statutory guidance in green)

The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children's early, back-and-forth interactions lay the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of conversations they engage in with adults and peers throughout the day, within a language-rich environment, are crucial. Practitioners can effectively build children's language by commenting on their interests or activities and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added. Regularly reading to children, actively engaging them in stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems, and providing extensive opportunities to use and

embed new words in various contexts contribute to children's thriving. Through conversation, storytelling, and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and through sensitive questioning that encourages them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.

Communication and Language encompass listening, attention, understanding, and speaking. We employ the internationally recognized **Hanen Approach – Learning Language and Loving It**.

This approach is used to teach with:

- High-quality interactions with children
- Session times and routines
- Thoughtfully planned experiences to maximise children's vocabulary
- A framework for staff professional development

Key elements include:

- Identifying children's styles and stages of language development for individualised planning
- Talking with children rather than to them – observing, waiting, and listening
- Encouraging shared conversations, commenting, and open-ended questions
- Extending the topic of conversation (sustained shared thinking)
- Integration with our literacy curriculum – storytelling, reading, writing
- Daily use of **Makaton** to develop communication skills visually, stimulating sounds and words, and aiding language development
- Reflecting and discussing learning with children, displayed on **Tapestry** as a whole class or in small groups, with the child's permission. Children are encouraged to share reflections and answer questions. We believe that allocating time to child-led learning, following children's interests, encourages more language, alongside extending thinking 'in the moment'.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Children's personal, social, and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for leading healthy and happy lives and fundamental to cognitive development. Underpinning personal development are the significant attachments that shape the social world of children. Strong, warm, and supportive relationships with adults enable children to understand their feelings and those of others. Support should be provided to help manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set simple goals, have confidence in their abilities, persist, wait for what they want, and direct attention as necessary. Through adult modelling and guidance, children learn to care for their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Supported interaction with other children teaches them how to form good friendships, cooperate, and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes provide a secure platform for children to succeed at school and in later life.

Personal, social, and emotional development includes building relationships, managing self-care, and self-regulation. We utilise the **Conflict Resolution approach**, consistently following six steps that are repeated in different conflict contexts. Over time, children learn to use them independently, empowering them to have a voice, learn self-regulation and listening, explore their feelings, develop an understanding of others' feelings, and foster a sense of justice and community.

We follow the PSHE program **JIGSAW**, a weekly, pre-planned part of our curriculum that adopts a mindfulness approach to support children's emotional well-being, self-regulation, mental health and resilience. Children engage with complex ideas such as their rights, inclusion, diversity, citizenship, and British Values. Challenging issues, including safeguarding and online safety, are addressed. Children are encouraged to think positively about their mental and physical health, make healthy choices, and develop independence, learning about privacy and personal safety.

Additionally, we use **Anti-bullying Alliance** materials to reflect on our practice and provision as an anti-bullying school. Inspired by the '**Thrive**' approach to learning, we aim to embed this in the Early Years.

Visual timetables in both classes support each child with what comes next in the day. In our core experiences, every child has the opportunity to share their emotions and talk about how they are feeling through our emotions board. We operate a key person approach where every child is connected to a member of staff.

Physical Development

Physical activity is essential for children's overall development, enabling them to lead happy, healthy, and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop progressively during early childhood, beginning with sensory explorations and the development of a child's strength, coordination, and positional awareness through activities like tummy time, crawling, and play movement with both objects and adults. Creating games and offering play opportunities both indoors and outdoors allows adults to support children in developing core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, coordination, and agility. Gross motor skills form the foundation for healthy bodies and social-emotional well-being, while fine motor control and precision aid hand-eye coordination, later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small-world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts, and the use of small tools, with feedback and support from adults, enable children to develop proficiency, control, and confidence.

Physical development includes fine motor and gross motor skills. Our approach is based on Fundamental Movement Skills from **The Physical Literacy Handbook**. These include agility, balance, coordination, speed, jumping, climbing, walking, hopping, skipping, throwing, dribbling, kicking, hitting, and catching. Examples might include balancing, running at speed, coordinating to carry a large block, and jumping into a puddle.

Fine Motor (Fingers, Hands, Mouth, Tongue, Eyes)

Our indoor and outdoor areas, resources, and planned experiences are carefully selected to promote fine motor skills. We provide repeated and varied experiences to develop children's proficiency, control, dexterity, and confidence. We use playdough and planned fine motor activities through the '**Funky Fingers**' approach, including poking, squeezing, patting, rolling, pincer grip, stirring, pegging, pouring, squashing, pulling, and grasping. In Nursery, they follow '**Finger Gym**' and '**Dough Disco**,' developing fine motor strength. We have scissors available in both classrooms and plan activities that promote cutting with scissors, such as making masks and stick puppets.

Our Reception class follows a scheme of work called **PE Planning**, which supports teachers with guidance on developing gross motor skills through key skills progression.

Literacy

It is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading. Reading consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading. Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and non-fiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together. Skilled word reading, taught later, involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing).

Literacy includes: comprehension, word reading and writing

Our curriculum gives a balance between incidental teaching and pre-planned learning in lesson times. Our teaching of reading is closely connected to our teaching of communication and language (see above).

Reading

Reading is a complex process and a skilled reader needs to learn language comprehension as well as word reading strategies.

The simple view of reading also explains the vital connection between word recognition and comprehension. Children need both elements to be skilled readers.

Our approach to reading is underpinned by the following key strategies:

1. Understanding of fiction and non-fiction books
2. Helicopter Stories
3. Dialogic Book Talk
4. 'Print Referencing' concepts about print
5. Phonics - Read, Write Inc

Helicopter Stories

Through this approach we help to connect children's love of play with their love of stories, narrative and character. With this approach, children have opportunities to act out their own stories which is initially scribed by the teacher in their individual books.

Dialogic Book Talk

This approach describes the way in which practitioners (and parents) read with children. This approach is vital in helping children's development of language comprehension. They prompt the child to say something about the book, evaluate their response, expand on the child's response by rephrasing, adding information, then repeat the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion. There are a range of different types of prompts that can be used.

Print referencing concepts about print

For children to become skilled readers they need to know about how print and concepts about print work. When we read with children, we use this opportunity to explore:

- the meaning of print,
- book and print organisation (who is the author, top to bottom, left to right, page order etc.)
- letters e.g., names of letters, upper case lower case etc.
- words - the idea of a word as a distinct unit of print

Writing

Writing is physically and intellectually demanding, relying on spoken language and children's physical development. Children's readiness to write varies, and we support them when they are ready to move from making marks to writing.

Motivation to write

We show children that writing is a form of communication and self-expression by acting as models and using writing in our interactions with them. We act as scribes during storytelling (Helicopter Stories and 'Write Dance' with big sheets of paper), using children's interests to engage them in writing for a purpose. The learning environment is stocked with high-quality writing materials, freely accessible indoors and outdoors. We provide resources for role-play scenarios, encouraging children to take on roles and write as shopkeepers, traffic wardens, doctors, etc. We display and appreciate children's early mark-making, creating an audience for their writing. Exposure to handwritten print is ensured by displaying it in the environment, and we inspire motivation to write through well-loved traditional tales.

Capability to write

We support children's physical development—both gross and fine motor skills—to build core strength, dexterity, and hand-eye coordination, essential foundations for writing. When physically ready, we teach children rules of print through reading and writing, such as moving from left to right across a page. We encourage children to hold and use writing tools with a tripod grip once

physically able. We introduce correct letter formation through modelling writing, describing movements, and starting each letter, using their name as a starting point (Read Write Inc rhymes—also given to parents).

'Reading & Writing float on a sea of talk' (James Britton)

Mathematics

Developing a robust foundation in numbers is crucial for all children to excel in mathematics. Children should confidently count, understand numbers up to 10, comprehend their relationships, and recognize patterns within those numbers.

Providing frequent and varied opportunities, such as using manipulatives like small pebbles and tens frames for counting organisation, allows children to build and apply this understanding. This approach ensures a secure base of knowledge and vocabulary for the mastery of mathematics. Additionally, the curriculum should offer rich opportunities for spatial reasoning development across all areas of mathematics, including shape, space, and measurement. It's essential for children to develop positive attitudes and interests in mathematics, actively look for patterns and connections, take initiative, and communicate with adults and peers about their observations without fear of making mistakes.

Mathematics encompasses numbers, patterns and connections, and spatial reasoning. We dedicate time and opportunities for children to make connections in their mathematical understanding, both through play and discrete teaching sessions.

Reception follows **White Rose Maths** (whole school approach) to ensure well-planned and resourced provision and lessons. Nursery also adheres to the **White Rose Maths 'master the curriculum' scheme**. Mathematics skills are sequentially taught, allowing children to develop fluency, reasoning, and problem-solving across all mathematical areas.

Lessons are carefully planned following the White Rose Maths approach, ensuring interlinking concepts and utilising the Concrete, Pictorial, and Abstract ways of learning. We explicitly teach mathematical vocabulary, providing regular opportunities for children to discuss and rehearse newly taught terms.

Practitioners actively engage with children's mathematics during play, posing problems, modelling language, and aiding children in mathematizing their thoughts. Different contexts and multiple representations are provided to deepen understanding, encouraging children to communicate their mathematical thinking in various ways.

Recognizing '**Children's Mathematical Graphics**' (Elizabeth Carruthers) plays an important role. We use 'maths glasses' to see their marks as potential problem-solving on paper. We delve into children's marks, inviting them to elaborate on their thinking.

Children are encouraged to explore new mathematical concepts in a concrete way, using real-life situations and objects. The Concrete–Pictorial–Abstract approach helps develop a sense of underlying concepts and structures of mathematics.

At Drybrook, we motivate learners by allowing them to touch, feel, and manipulate the physical nature of mathematics, connecting abstract numbers and symbols with real-life experiences.

To develop mathematical mastery, children progress to abstract mathematical thinking, incorporating movement or sound to move beyond reliance on visual cues. When introducing concepts, we use correct mathematical language, embedding concepts into everyday life and showcasing their real-life applications.

Mastery through play and daily routines is promoted, with mathematical provocations and challenge zones for independent exploration. Daily routines, such as sorting toys or estimating class attendance, provide opportunities for 'in the head' maths.

Questioning during play and interaction creates opportunities for mathematical understanding and development, fostering critical thinking skills. Sorting and grouping activities encourage reasoning and pattern recognition.

Our curriculum employs a subtle balance of teaching, adult interaction, play-based learning, provocations, and continuous provision. Snack time becomes intentional teaching, where Nursery children discuss the shapes of fruits, and Reception children solve real-life problems through counting.

Our classrooms and outdoor environments are meticulously planned to provide mathematical experiences, with various resources like 'loose part' materials, puzzles, number lines, experimental measuring tools, building blocks, numerals, and props for number representation in songs and rhymes.

Reception children extend their mathematical challenges at home through the **Doodle Maths** app, aligning with classroom teaching. Each classroom, indoor and outdoor, is equipped with designated areas and materials to facilitate mathematical experiences, ensuring a holistic approach to mathematics education.

Our indoor and outdoor environments are carefully planned to provide mathematical experiences for children. Each classroom has:

- A block area
- Construction
- Puzzles
- Open-ended resources for counting, shape, measures
- Loose parts
- Graphic materials for mark making and real-life connections (maps, calendars).

Outdoor

- Games/number games
- Loose parts and blocks
- Water area
- Graphic materials for mark making and real-life connections (maps, calendars)
- Sand area

Understanding the World

Understanding the world involves guiding children to comprehend their physical surroundings and community. The frequency and diversity of children's personal experiences enhance their knowledge—from visits to parks, libraries, and museums to interactions with vital societal figures such as police officers, nurses, and firefighters. Exposure to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems contributes to their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically, and ecologically diverse world. Enriching and expanding children's vocabulary fosters later reading comprehension.

Understanding the World includes exploring past and present, people, culture and communities, and the natural world. At Drybrook, celebrations, experiences, and events reflecting children's cultures and faiths are organised throughout the year. Festivals like Luna New Year, Eid, Holi, and Diwali are incorporated into yearly activities. Children also learn **Spanish** with a dedicated teacher once every two weeks, providing exposure to another language.

The physical environment, both indoors and outdoors, is arranged to invite children to explore concepts and be curious about the world. Concepts may arise from children's interests or naturally occurring phenomena such as puddles, spring, or light and dark, which adults use to support

teaching and learning opportunities. **Forest School** offers ample opportunities for children to explore the natural world alongside their peers and adults.

Local trips to places like the goat farm, car garage, and local pharmacy and shop are organised, with children encouraged to bring questions to ask.

Researching the past involves children talking to parents and grandparents about past toys, aligning with the Year 1 history topic—Toys.

Technology is utilised to find out about the world, document learning, and involve children in their own learning through interactive screens and iPads.

Collaborating closely with Dene Magna School allows us to access their resources, enhancing our curriculum. Springtime brings lambs and chicks, providing learning opportunities about animal care, growth, and change. Stories like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Superworm* are used to learn about life cycles and insects, complemented by insect hunts. Discussions about different homes worldwide are sparked by stories like *Handa's Surprise*.

The **PLAN - Primary Science Resources assessment tool** ensures the broad range of science topics is taught.

Expressive Arts and Design

The development of children's artistic and cultural awareness supports imagination and creativity. Regular opportunities to engage with the arts enable exploration and play with various media and materials. Quality and variety in what children see, hear, and participate in are crucial for developing understanding, self-expression, vocabulary, and communication through the arts. Expressive Arts and Design involve enabling children to create with materials and access opportunities for being imaginative and expressive, sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings through art, music, dance, role play, and design and technology.

Art and Design

We aim to instil a passion for creativity and the arts, focusing on the process of creative learning. Children have independent access to media and materials, part of our continuous provision.

Various paper sizes and types, along with mark-making tools, are available. Different coloured, shaped, and textured materials for collage, as well as glue, scissors, string, sellotape, masking tape, and playdough, are provided.

Support in learning new techniques or skills, such as cutting, printing, or colour mixing, is based on children's interests. Teaching new skills is facilitated by adults introducing new media and techniques, modelling, explaining, and supporting children's learning.

Transient Art is utilised for children to freely explore creating. Block areas in each room allow children to design and build with open-ended resources.

Music and Dance

An Outdoor Music and Dance Area in the garden provides a well-resourced space for children to explore music and dance actively. The music curriculum delivery aligns with the **Early Education Musical Development Matters document** and our **PE scheme, PE Planning**.

Children participate in exploration and learning based on themes of hearing & listening, vocalising & singing, moving & dancing, and exploring & playing. They can listen to a range of music, have access to a variety of musical instruments, learn ring games and songs, and create stages and shows for performances.

Imaginative play (pretend play/role play)

Adults support children taking on roles in their play by engaging in pretend play and modelling pretending. **Helicopter Stories** allow children to be creative, perform, and develop language and confidence. The small world area with additional props encourages children to build and create their own play props.

As an Early Years team, we are continuously learning and reflecting so please do speak with us if you have any ideas on how to make our curriculum even better for our wonderful children. Thank you for taking the time to read our curriculum overview.