



EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS) FRAMEWORK

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Willow Dene Foundation Stage is a specialist setting for children in the Early Years. Our children have a range of challenges affecting various aspects of their learning and health, including complex medical needs and autism.

Our aim is to make the Foundation Stage an enjoyable place for children to be and in which to learn, through a wide range of stimulating activities, environments and experiences that are child-initiated and adult-led. We know that children's experiences in the Foundation Stage are the basis upon which further learning is built, and as such it is hugely important. Our staff have a wealth of experience and receive ongoing training, and we use planned and supported play throughout our curriculum, with a strong emphasis on independence – something that is at the core of the Willow Dene curriculum model.

Our practice is built on the **overarching principles** of the EYFS:

- the unique child
- positive relationships
- enabling environments with teaching and support from adults
- the importance of learning and development

And we place importance on the **Characteristics of Effective Learning**:

- playing and exploring
- active learning
- creating and thinking critically

We cover all the **Prime and Specific areas**:

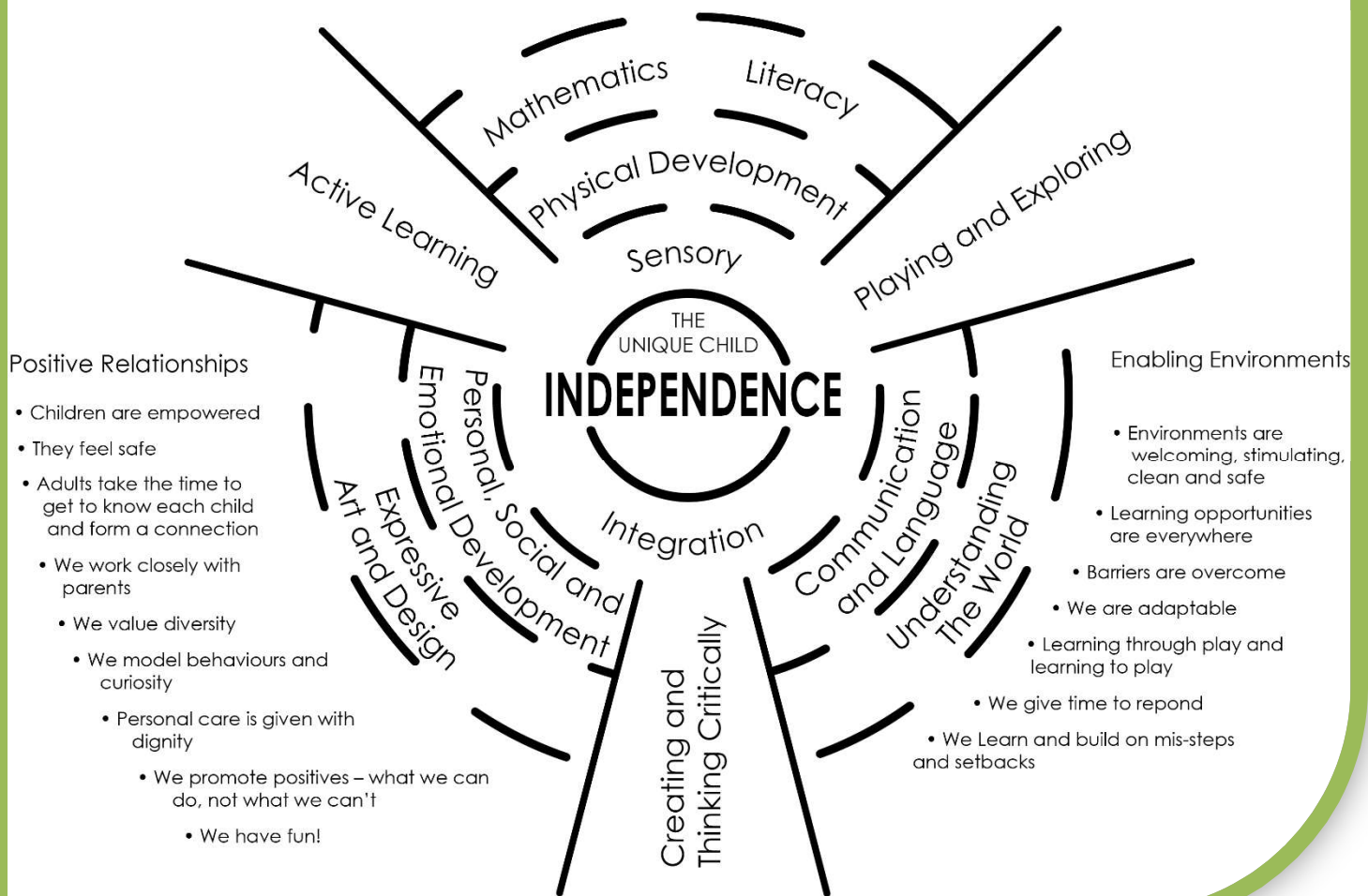
- personal, social and emotional development
- physical development
- communication and language
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

Within these, we recognise that learning looks different for our children, and through our close knowledge of them as individuals, we are able to adapt and adjust the framework of the EYFS to make it meaningful, challenging and inspiring. We understand what learning looks like for our children. This policy details our approach to the Early Years Foundation Stage, through looking at first the themes and commitments, then the characteristics of effective learning and finally the seven areas of learning.

The EYFS at Willow Dene

The Early Years Foundation Stage at Willow Dene is centred on building independence for each child as an individual. This is achieved through the relationships staff form with the children in their care, and our environment which is geared toward achievement. We meet children's sensory integration needs in order to nurture the characteristics of effective learning – creating and thinking critically, playing and exploring, and active learning. These flow outward through the prime and specific areas of the EYFS, which overlap and blend in our cross-curricular topics.

This allows for an exciting, vibrant curriculum with opportunities for learning to be personalised and embedded over time.



The EYFS Themes at Willow Dene

A unique child

We recognise that our children are individuals and that the challenges they face, their disabilities and conditions, are merely one aspect of their life – distinct from their individual personalities.

Our high ratio of staff to children in each class allows for adults to develop strong and deep connections with the children they work with, to get to know the very specific things that are important to them, their likes and dislikes, the ways they learn and other important factors such as cultural diversity and families' needs. We place a great emphasis on forming strong relationships with children and families. We work in small class groups, but at times break off into even smaller groups to allow for children to pair up or work with one or two adults on a specific skill.

Our staff are experienced working with children who have a wide range of developmental needs, and team members receive ongoing and specific training. We work in conjunction with the range of therapists based on the school site, as well as the leaders of our specialist provisions such as sensory processing, swim teams or forest school leaders. As each child is unique, they learn in different ways. We are able to adapt timetables, staffing, strategies, and types of input to maximise the learning opportunities for each child.

We work closely with each child's family when they start at Willow Dene, to build the foundations of a strong relationship between home and school, respecting diversity and the rich and varied backgrounds of our school population. We work in partnership with parents, value their expertise and respect that they know their children better than anyone. We take seriously the responsibility of teaching but also caring for our children, many of whom rely on adults for all or most of their health, wellbeing and safety, including the management of complex medical issues. Our high levels of staffing allow children to 'have a go' at experiences and challenge themselves in the safety of a supportive and enabling environment.



Within the Unique Child theme are the commitments to keeping children safe and attending to their health and well-being. All staff have safeguarding, health and safety training, epilepsy, asthma and anaphylaxis training annually, in addition to manual handling and medical training as appropriate to the children in their class. All EYFS classes have a member of staff with paediatric first aid training. Behaviour plans for children who need them are in place, shared, agreed and updated regularly between staff and parents.

We comply with the welfare requirements as stated in the Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2021:

- Promote the welfare and safeguarding of children.
- Promote good health, preventing the spread of infection and taking appropriate action when children are ill.
- Manage behaviour effectively in a manner appropriate for the children's stage of development and individual needs.
- Ensure all adults who look after the children or who have unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so.
- Ensure that the premises, furniture and equipment are safe and suitable for purpose.
- Ensure that every child receives enjoyable and challenging learning and development experiences tailored to meet their needs.
- Maintain records, policies and procedures required for safe efficient management of the setting and to meet the needs of the children.

The EYFS learning environment and the resources in it are kept clean, safe, hygienic and fit for purpose through a planned and monitored approach.

Also contributing to children's health and wellbeing are the equipment and activities we use to develop physical skills, as detailed below in the Area of Learning and Development.

Child and adult led learning

At Willow Dene, the balance of child-led and adult-led learning differs from a mainstream setting for each child. We use the child's interests and information from parents and other professionals to develop a child's interests and help them feel safe and secure with familiar experiences and resources when they start the EYFS. From this initial experience, we support children to make choices during their play, discover new things they like and dislike, and extend their repertoire of play skills and interests. We support children to develop their interests, curiosity and flexibility within their learning. We focus on a child's shared attention and ability to sustain their attention in activities of their choosing whilst supporting them to attend to adult led learning opportunities. We adapt the environment to consider the children's physical and sensory needs to access their learning. This may take the form of equipment, physical support, technology or adaptations to the learning

environment. We develop our children's independence through allowing children to explore, detailed observation, planning of next steps, scaffolding and modelling.

The adult uses our curriculum to provide structured opportunities to be part of a group with stimulating, motivating experiences, supporting children to develop 1-1 interactions and the social motivation to want to be part of a social setting. The adult provides planned opportunities to develop appropriate social behaviours and appropriate cues, prompts or visual supports, routines, and established structures to create relevant learning opportunities based on an understanding of an individual child's needs. The balance of child led, and adult directed learning enables children to learn to purposefully self-occupy and prepare for a more structured learning experience later on in life.

Positive Relationships

Positive relationships involve those interactions between children and their peers, between staff and children, between staff and parents, and between parents themselves.



Between school and home

We place a great importance on engaging with families before their child has even begun at Willow Dene. Parents are encouraged to visit Willow Dene EYFS if they are considering a place for their child. This is a first point of contact with new parents and is an opportunity for parents, family members and any other professionals to see the school in action, and visit the wide range of specialist learning environments and therapy services on site. We accommodate visits at times that suit parents, but we encourage people to see the school during the day when children are in and learning. Children are welcome to attend these tours and can even get a chance to play and explore! We encourage as many visits as necessary and are there to answer questions and provide information. We recognise that choosing the right school is a hugely important decision and are keen that parents are fully informed about the Early Years at Willow Dene when making their choice.

Once a child has secured a place at Willow Dene, but before they start attending, teachers, and sometimes other staff such as senior teaching assistants or nurses, will undertake home visits to meet the child and their family, other professionals involved in the child's life and care, and will also visit the child in their previous nursery or school setting. We recognise that parents know their children better than anyone, and can share with us their knowledge of their child. Many of our children have very small and subtle responses and rely on the adults around them to interpret these signals. Engaging with parents is the first step in this process. We offer families as much time and support as possible throughout their child's time with us, and have an open door policy whereby parents are welcome to visit us to see what happens in class. As most children arrive at school on buses, we update parents on their child's day through writing in the home school contact book daily. Parents are encouraged to write in response where there is information to share. Where parents prefer contact to be on the phone or via email we are happy to accommodate this. Willow Dene also employs Family Support and Health Support Advisors who can assist families with a range of issues and who coordinates a weekly coffee morning / support group for parents.

We do our best to make the transition to Willow Dene smooth for families, and provide photos of the staff and environment, as well as opportunities for children to visit with parents or familiar staff before they officially start with us.

We encourage parents to come in with their child on their first day, where they can meet the class team and make contact with other professionals such as therapists who may work with their child.

Throughout the child's time in the EYFS further home visits may be undertaken, often to support parents to implement strategies at home which their child is using at school – allowing the child to generalise skills and for parents to back up learning being worked on in class. We also regularly encourage parents to join us for special events such as Christmas concerts, our 'sharing time' assemblies and themed activities around particular dates in the calendar.

Between children and their peers

Developing friendships is an area that is particularly challenging for a lot of our children. We encourage children to make friendships and engage with their peers and we structure this into the class activities. This can be difficult for children who are reliant on adults for every aspect of their care just as it can be for children with autism.

Our children rely on the staff to help them to be part of their class group and to share experiences with a small group of other children (classes have a small number of children in them). Skills that go towards being able to develop friendships may have to be taught and children are encouraged to work alongside their peers, to take part in paired activities and turn-taking games helping them to recognise and acknowledge each other.

Enabling environments

Our environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning. The environment is more than physical space because it contains the emotions of the children who spend time at our school and the atmosphere generated by the staff who work there. We have a 'can-do' attitude, focusing on what children are able to achieve, with the right amount of support. All staff have a good understanding of child development and receive ongoing training to develop their skills and knowledge. We are experienced engaging children with complex medical needs and a range of learning disabilities, and work closely with the other professionals in a child's life enabling them to meet the realistic, challenging and meaningful goals set for them and *with* them. The EYFS at Willow Dene is safe but challenging, well-resourced and structured to the needs of our learners, all of whose achievements are celebrated in a way that is meaningful to them and their families.



- We enable children to access experiences they cannot access on their own, due to their physical, medical, sensory or learning disabilities.
- We believe that children gain enormous benefits from learning outdoors and encourage classes to access our outdoor learning environments in all but the worst weather. Being outdoors supports confidence and allows opportunities for large-scale play, enhanced physical activity, and calculated risk-taking. Where being outside is not practical for health reasons we provide activities to 'bring the outdoors in.'
- For children with complex needs, being outside links with our MOVE learning experiences and allows our children to try new challenges. We make use of the sensory experiences that are available outside; the weather, different environments, smells and sounds.
- Our indoor spaces are carefully thought out to challenge children with varied interests, a range of needs and who are working on many different skills.
- Our classrooms are adapted to the needs of the children, and include clearly defined areas to help children to make sense of their environment. Workstations provide distraction-free spaces in which to focus and concentrate on new skills; book areas demonstrate our love

of literature; home corners encourage imaginative play and there is always enough room for equipment to support children to develop their independent movement, whether they are learning to move, crawl, walk, use a wheelchair or climb.

- Children with mobility needs are encouraged to stand and hold on, kneel, reach and sit as independently as possible. We use height-adjustable tables and our computers have touch-screen access. Areas are clearly defined for visually impaired children and resources are presented with appropriate adapted contrast. We share the school's environmental protocols and approach to vibrant and stimulating displays.
- We make full use of the technology available to us to develop children's learning skills and engagement.
- We have interactive touchscreen TVs, iPads, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, a sensory garden, eye-gaze facilities, a magic carpet interactive floor and multi-sensory room, adapted computers, desks and switches to open up technology to our children.
- We believe that technology should be used to enhance the teaching and learning that takes place in the Foundation Stage. It can augment children's communication, and be a great motivator, developing engagement, attention, anticipation and curiosity.



Learning and Development

Children learn through play, but this is something that can be a challenge for our children. As many of our children have physical disabilities we support them in individual ways to enable them to play and take an active part in their learning. For those children with autism we use a variety of strategies to develop play skills.

We believe in active learning, that children need experiences and to learn by doing. We support our children to make choices and have ownership, giving them lots of time to respond and focussing on the individual approaches each child needs. We know that our children learn and develop in different ways, have different strengths and interests and our work reflects this.

We strike a balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities, understanding the issues that affect our children and using our support to scaffold learning opportunities for them. Many of our activities are adult-led, because without this support our children would not be able to access activities, yet the principles of the EYFS are evident in everything we do. We have a 'total communication' environment, using objects, photos, symbols, signing, auditory and touch cues to help children develop their understanding so that we can find out the most effective ways for us to communicate with each other.

Observation, Planning and Assessment

In the Foundation Stage we plan in a cross-curricular fashion – meaning that across our week we will cover all the prime and specific areas of the EYFS through a number of different activities. Classes plan their week based on topics or themes, some of which are determined by events in the calendar and others which come from the children's interests – our teachers have the flexibility and skills to let our planning be child-led, responding to the 'unique child'. Activities can often target several of the EYFS areas of learning at once and teachers monitor this across the year in their medium-term plans to ensure breadth of coverage. As with the core Willow Dene curriculum, independence is central to everything we do.

Our planning takes into account the fact that our children are all individual and that often their learning is not sequential. Our children often need repetition and time to consolidate and embed skills, as well as opportunities to generalise what has been learned.

We make close observations of our children, both in writing and through videos and photographs. These opportunities for observation are built into the daily and weekly plans and are used to evaluate progress on an ongoing basis, to evidence progress and to inform planning for next steps in targets set in Personal Learning Plans. This photographic evidence is also shared with parents and carers at Baselines and Annual Review meetings.

We use Willow Dene's own assessment system, 'Learning Journeys', as well as baselining in our two-year-old provision Toucan, to track children's progress, alongside a continuous dialogue with parents about progress at home, assessments in other areas as appropriate, such as MOVE (Movement Opportunities Via Education), therapist involvement, Personal Learning Plans, and reference to the stages of child development.

Once a child has been with us for 6-8 weeks we hold a baseline meeting with parents where we share a report, videos and photographs showing how their

child has settled. Here we agree on targets for the next six months, at which point the child will have their Annual Review meeting where more evidence is shown and targets are agreed for the next year. Annual Review meetings occur once a year from this point forward and parents are invited to parents' evenings in the autumn and summer terms.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning

We use the Characteristics of Effective learning as the foundation of practice in Willow Dene's EYFS. Children both of EYFS age and those children at KS1 age who are placed in an EYFS class, are developing broad skills across the Characteristics of Effective Learning areas of Playing and Exploring, Creating and Thinking Critically and Active Learning. Our planning and assessment incorporate these areas and high-quality observations are captured to show holistic progress. Where appropriate, progress is linked to observations using our Learning Journey assessment system. In the EYFS we recognise that children both learn the specific knowledge and skills found in our Early Development Learning Journeys framework alongside needing opportunities to practice, embed and learn through the broader areas identified in the Characteristics of Effective Learning. By the end of children's time in the EYFS, we aim for children to be effective learners, as well as to be building skills to be independent, engaged and resilient. Children leave the EYFS Department knowing that Willow Dene is a safe, enjoyable and vibrant place where they are happy, engaged, and understand that learning is fun. We do this by using the Characteristics of Effective learning as the bedrock of their experiences building in both incidental and planned opportunities that support the holistic as well as the specific learning of individual children.

Playing and Exploring

Many of our children with medical needs, physical disabilities or complex needs require a lot of adult support to enable them to play. All our staffing and environment are set up to facilitate this. For different reasons, children with

Autism find play just as difficult, often being unable to move play forward from repetitive actions, or to engage in imaginative play.



We set up situations to pique children's interest, to get their attention and to encourage curiosity. We use multi-sensory experiences and adapt our environment to enable everyone to engage. We offer choices, which may sometimes be limited, to enable children to focus on what is on offer and not be overwhelmed by the variety. We model approaches to play and how to do things, and use visual supports to back up communication. We narrate what is happening in simple, clear language. We aim to give children independence and to learn through experience. We challenge and support, and celebrate our children being willing to try. And when things don't go to plan, that's fine. Mistakes are built upon as the portals of discovery.

Active Learning

We use a number of strategies, such as the Attention Autism approach, to develop children's ability to focus on things others are doing, learning by observing and then taking part. We encourage children to stretch their skills, to adapt and engage with resources in new ways, to challenge themselves by doing things they might not try independently. We make things fun

– fun is motivating and will encourage our children to want to take part. We give a lot of time for children to take part, respond to opportunities, questions, and adapt to new experiences. Our class groups are small and we seek to foster a sense of unity amongst the children, both in classes and between classes. Our playtimes are often shared, giving children the opportunity to engage with peers from other classes, and the whole Foundation Stage joins together each week for our 'sharing time' assembly. We always celebrate achievements and encourage children to take pride in what they have done.



Creating and Thinking Critically

We encourage children to develop their thinking, setting up situations which pose questions. How can I get that? What does this do? Where did it go? Why did that happen? Who did that? How do I get in / out of / off this? We may model or partially model something to set children on the path toward a realisation, or may offer some physical prompting or guidance to encourage them to investigate. We may change routines, add surprises and create novelties to encourage critical thinking and investigation. We seek to encourage children to make links between things they have experienced, offering opportunities for repetition and over-learning, coming back to things they have already experienced but with a slight variation in order that they

may make connections, see patterns and generalise skills. We narrate play to develop language and understanding, and break things down into manageable chunks where appropriate. We value process over product – the learning involved in a child doing something themselves is more important than a perfect piece of adult-produced work! The Foundation Stage at Willow Dene is a learning community which focusses not just on *what* we are doing but also *how* it is being done.

The Areas of Learning and Development

Prime Areas:

Communication and Language

Developing intentional communication, affording learners as much autonomy, control and choice as possible, which they can use in the widest range of situations.

Listening, Attention and Understanding

We use a range of strategies to develop children's ability to attend to adult-led tasks and activities. Building attention is a key element of the foundation of learning, enabling children to observe and notice what is happening around them, to see how other people do things, and to open their eyes to the wider world.

- We use strategies such as Attention Autism to build the ability of children to engage in adult-led activities and things not necessarily of their choosing.
- Through structured teaching, we build children's ability to understand and respond appropriately to phrases containing a growing number of key words.
- Making connections between concepts is an important part of learning and is something our children may find difficult. We place an importance on generalising skills, being able to transfer them from one context or situation to another.



- From single words to full sentences, we seek to develop children's understanding of the spoken word. But understanding can also be of facial expressions, others' emotions, cues in their day and across their week.
- We understand that there is often a difference between what children can understand and what they can communicate.

Speaking

We know that children's communication, and the notion of 'speaking', can come in many forms, from the obvious verbal language, through the use of visual supports such as PECS and communication boards, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, to gesture, body language and emotional responses. We get to know our children and their methods of communication extremely well, in order to respond to what they're telling us and the manner in which they're saying it.



- We offer choices and teach decision-making in order to give children the opportunity to have control and be heard. We respond to occasions where children use their communication, reinforcing how they are listened to.
- We can follow children's lead in responding to their interests – making our planning child-centred.
- Staff are trained in implementing PECS, the Picture Exchange Communication System, for those children for whom it is appropriate, in addition to other forms of communication aids. We have a total communication approach, adapting the means of communication to the individual child, using whatever means are appropriate, from touch-cues to objects of reference and visual supports such as photographs or symbols.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Supporting children to develop a positive sense of themselves and awareness of, and interaction with, others. Helping them to manage their feelings and behaviour, to rise to challenges and develop independence.

Self-Regulation

We respect the ways our children may express their feelings and behaviour, but are supportive and encouraging when it comes to giving children the skills to manage their behaviours, emotions and responses.

- Our children may need more time to adapt to the new location, new adults and routines of their new school. We allow for plenty of time and individual support to settle children when they first start, and at other points of the year where new challenges arise. We support them to develop their confidence in their new environment.
- We seek to understand children's experiences prior to them starting at Willow Dene, to better grasp where they are coming from, how and why they may react to different experiences.
- We put in place behaviour plans detailing our strategies to support individual children with particular behaviours, with a view to promoting behaviours we want, minimising those we don't, and increasing children's independence and ability to manage their own feelings and responses.
- We support children to be aware of boundaries and behavioural expectations, to cope when things don't go to plan, when things come to an end, when something doesn't belong to them or must be shared.
- We will put in place sensory regulation strategies and sensory diets to help children to regulate themselves and know themselves better. Such strategies will also get children into a ready state for learning.

Building Relationships

We place a great importance on the strength of relationships between children and adults, as well as between children and their peers.

- We support children to separate from their parents happily and comfortably at the beginning of the year, and we pride ourselves on hearing that our children are excited to come to school.
- We aim to make all interactions between adults and children positive, supportive, caring and enabling. We want our children to see the adults as motivating and interesting, providers of exciting activities and learning opportunities, as well as being consistent and reliable.
- We use interaction techniques and other social games and strategies to promote positive interactions and develop relations between adults and children.



- We encourage children to develop an understanding of themselves as distinct from others and to notice the things that we share in common and the things that are our differences. We value diversity.
- We structure opportunities for turn-taking and sharing into our plans, for playing alongside peers and to see other children engaging in activities that they might then try themselves.
- We spend a lot of time getting to know our children really well, to interpret the signals and signs they may use where language is yet to develop. Our knowledge of how young children develop bonds and relationships helps us to offer the right nurturing environment to the youngest children at Willow Dene.

Managing Self

One product of strong relationships will be that children's confidence and self-awareness is improved. We want our children to be able to face challenges, problem-solve and be confident in themselves.



- Adults provide reassurance for children when facing new experiences, and adapt our support according to the needs of the individual child. We encourage a positive approach to experiences and challenges and understand the particular sensory difficulties that our children may face. We work with the school's Sensory Processing Coordinator to address such issues.
- We encourage children to express their needs and feelings in the manner appropriate for that child. We listen to them, whether through things they are saying, or, more often, through their actions and responses. We are sensitive to their needs but encouraging when supporting them to tackle new things.
- We build in opportunities for choice-making and adapt our means of communication to each child's means of communication, using auditory cues, touch cues, objects of reference, photographs or symbols alongside the spoken word.
- We are a healthy school and place importance on being active and eating well. We also encourage and teach children to be as independent as possible in as many aspects of their self-care as they are able. When we undertake personal care with children we do it with dignity and sensitivity.
- We encourage independence at meal and snack times, promoting opportunities for communication, as well as using cutlery, independent

feeding, trying new foods, drinking from open cups and putting waste in the bin.

- We are alert to children's allergies or dietary requirements.
- We encourage children to wash hands before eating and to brush their teeth after lunch each day.
- Where children are able to, we encourage them to assist in their dressing and undressing, and are able to support toilet-training where appropriate. We have a continence expert in the school nursing team who can also support parents in this area.



Physical Development

Developing all physical skills, from the smallest movements for children with limited mobility, to crawling, walking, climbing, running and all gross and fine motor movement in others. Developing body awareness, safely negotiating spaces and equipment and all aspects of self-care.

Gross Motor Skills

- The school is a MOVE centre of excellence. MOVE (Movement Opportunities Via Education) is an international activity-based programme, meaning children with physical disabilities have MOVE targets, promoting the development of movement skills such as sitting, standing, walking and transitioning through motivating activities and routines.
- We have equipment to support children's physical development at all levels, from the most active and energetic to children learning to make their first intentional movements. We have sensory circuits, playgrounds, climbing frames, swings, trampolines, ballpools, soft play areas, an



interactive magic carpet, eye gaze technology and our warm water pool. We also use yoga and massage programmes where appropriate.

- We have regular music and movement sessions developing children's gross motor skills with fun and exciting games.
- All classes access our Forest School site during the year and we encourage outdoor play and learning.

Fine Motor Skills

- We use a range of games and activities designed to develop children's fine motor control, the progression of hand-eye coordination, grip of mark-making tools and to support the progression of their play and self-care skills such as putting on shoes or zipping up a coat.
- Where children have medical or sensory needs that impact their fine motor control we work with therapists and the sensory processing team on a coordinated plan to develop specific skills.

Specific Areas:

Physical Development

Word Reading

We aim to foster a love of reading, literature and storytelling from the outset. Each room has a book area where children can access books at appropriate levels, from tactile and lift-the-flap books designed to develop an interest in what's on the page, to perennial children's favourites and even personalised books featuring photographs of individual children with symbolised captions.

- We use sensory stories to bring tales alive for our children, using roleplay, turn-taking and sensory experiences to create memorable moments for children related to literature.
- We use songs and rhymes throughout our days, encouraging familiarity and engagement in rhymes and patterns of language, offering children the chance to fill in gaps in routines they become aware of.
- We use technology such as switches with pre-recorded phrases on them, for children to press to say things in familiar stories.



- Children are exposed to poetry, stories and songs daily, and where appropriate, teaching in phonics through a systematic synthetic approach.

Writing

We recognise that the roots of writing come through an understanding of the spoken word and language, which can often be an area our children find challenging.

- Where appropriate we support children to develop their control of mark-making tools such as pens, crayons, colouring pencils and paintbrushes, building on this sensory exploration to the point where children are distinguishing between the marks they make.
- We work to develop children's physical skills when holding and manipulating mark-making implements, developing grip through the various stages of development.
- Where children are ascribing meaning to the marks they are making, we support them to develop their fine motor control, to recognise letters and numbers in their environment, to trace lines and shapes and to colour with control.



Comprehension

We use a total communication approach to support our children's understanding and comprehension across their time with us.

- We create and adapt sensory stories to introduce topics and concepts, language, ideas and experiences to our children, at levels that are appropriate to their individual stages of development.
- We believe in the rich benefits of stories and strive to open up the world of literature and link this to learning across the week, learning that becomes more meaningful for our children through repetition and our cross-curricular planning.

Mathematics

Numbers

We support the early investigation of numbers and quantities through a wide range of number songs, action rhymes and opportunities for counting across the day. In music sessions we may tap along to familiar rhythms on a variety of instruments. When rolling up our sleeves for hand-washing we may count as each arm is bared. When dressing we may count the buttons on a cardigan.

- We use real objects and always seek to find opportunities for counting and labelling numbers, how many people are in a small-world family, the number of children in class that day, bags on pegs, colours of paints we can use.
- We use resources such as numicon pieces to support the concrete understanding of early numbers.



Numerical Patterns

We recognise that the roots of early mathematical development are found in the characteristics of effective learning, in playing and exploring, investigating, understanding the world, problem-solving and physical development.

- For some of our children, some of the earliest skills we teach include developing responses to their environment and to stimuli; exploring and combining senses; responding to changes in a sequence in a sensory activity or different qualities of patterns of movement; responding to things starting and stopping.
- As these responses become more purposeful we develop them through early cause and effect; focussing and tracking sights or sounds; recognising change, developing an awareness of hands – grasping, holding, swiping and releasing; expressing likes and dislikes.



- This then builds into choosing; understanding object permanence; problem-solving and curiosity / questioning: What does this do? How can I open it? How can I reach it? What happens if I push it?
- This in turn leads to adapting and trying different strategies; exploring things that have different shapes, sizes, textures and properties; organising and categorising objects; recognising big and small things; understanding the concept of 'more'; understanding that things might happen 'now'; following daily routines and associating a sequence of actions with routines.
- Progress then leads to developing and improving skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and describing shapes, spaces, and measures.
- Other children might have good rote counting skills but a need to be able to use this knowledge practically, learning about quantities or being able to generalise the skill of number knowledge to everyday situations.

Understanding the World

People, Culture and Communities

We encourage our children's families to be a part of Willow Dene in a number of ways, from engaging with the class team through the home school contact book, to invitations to regular sharing time events and celebrations throughout the year.

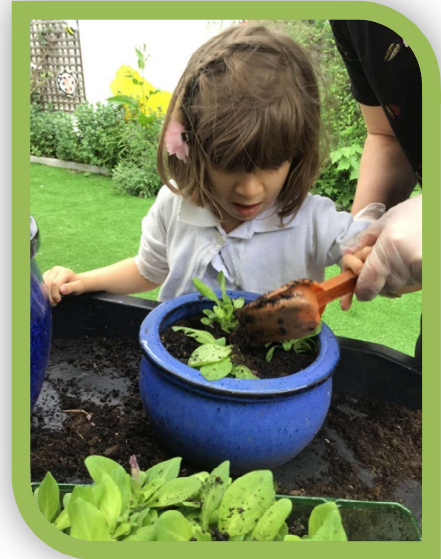
- We celebrate the different cultures of the children at Willow Dene and beyond, incorporating different festivals and landmarks into the calendar of the Foundation Stage.
- The school has a weekly coffee morning for parents and employs both a Family Support Advisor and a Health Advisor. Parents are also invited to accompany class trips and activities.
- We provide trips out of school where possible, giving children a breadth of experience of being out and about in their local area.



- We have links with the other schools in our Compass Partnership, and also welcome pupils from local secondary schools who have run sessions for our children during specialist event weeks.

The Natural World

- We support children to understand places and events, to adjust to and accept new environments and experiences, to investigate and to learn about the world beyond their home, their class and themselves.
- For some children this starts with the space around them, for others this is the wider world beyond what they've experienced so far.
- We utilise the array of indoor and outdoor learning environments Willow Dene has to offer and are active throughout the year, learning about different seasons.
- We offer opportunities for children to use all their senses to explore and learn about the world, both out in the world and by bringing different experiences into school.



Past and Present

- We explore links to the past through multi-sensory sessions, incorporating outside visits to attractions and sites of interest, tailoring experience to how our children learn. For children whose understanding of time may be at a very early level, we make such learning opportunities tactile, hands on affairs, with sights, sounds, smells and tastes to bring learning to life.



Expressive Arts and Design

Creating with Materials

We support children to explore through different sensory experiences, with adults helping to develop their responses to different textures and materials.

- Adults may model approaches for children to imitate and then improvise from.
- We may tailor how resources are introduced to children according to their different and preferred sensory channels. Children are provided with materials to explore while adults help children to develop their responses, their understanding and their skills
- Children are supported to try new things in environments that are carefully planned. These activities encourage children to be interested and engaged, to focus, explore and to persist.



Being Imaginative and Expressive

We believe in giving children lots of opportunities to express themselves in a variety of ways, from movements, actions and sounds to art activities, music sessions, dressing up, small world play, puppets and roleplay.

- We recognise that the development of imaginative play can be difficult for many of the children at Willow Dene and use a variety of strategies to address this issue, including sensory stories, intensive interaction techniques and music therapy.
- Adults model a lot of play techniques for children and then look for those moments when children use resources in new and imaginative ways.



Safeguarding

The Foundation Stage at Willow Dene takes the safety and welfare of our children extremely seriously. We follow the school's safeguarding policy and procedures and are fully compliant with the requirements of the statutory framework for the EYFS as set down by the Department for Education.

Safeguarding Policies and Procedures

The Foundation Stage follows the school's safeguarding policy and procedures and operates in full compliance with the statutory EYFS framework. Safeguarding policies reflect current statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children. A Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is in place within the department and is clearly identified and accessible to all staff. All staff are familiar with and annually review the whistleblowing policy, with DSL contact details clearly displayed on staff access passes.

Staff Training Staff Training and Awareness

All staff receive annual safeguarding training, including mandatory training on the Prevent duty, FGM and online safety, and have a clear understanding of the signs and indicators of abuse and how to respond appropriately to concerns. A member of the EYFS leadership team is a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), ensuring strong oversight and support. Safeguarding training is embedded in daily practice, enabling staff to act confidently and consistently to protect children's welfare.

Reporting and Recording Concerns

Concerns about children's welfare are reported promptly to a DSL in line with school procedures. The MyConcern online system is used consistently to record, monitor and follow up safeguarding concerns, ensuring appropriate action is taken. All safeguarding records are maintained clearly, accurately and are stored securely in accordance with data protection requirements.

Safer Recruitment, Suitability

All staff hold up-to-date DBS disclosures appropriate to their role, ensuring their suitability to work with children. Safer recruitment guidance is followed rigorously throughout recruitment and employment processes to promote safeguarding at all stages. Agency staff, volunteers and parents are never left unsupervised with children, ensuring children's safety is maintained at all times.

Use of Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are not permitted in the Foundation Stage; all staff are required to store personal devices in staff only lockers during working hours. Visitors to the setting must hand in mobile phones at reception to ensure children's safety and privacy is maintained at all times.

Attendance, Absences and Emergency Contacts

Unexplained or prolonged child absences are followed up promptly in line with school procedures to ensure children's safety and wellbeing.

Attendance records are maintained accurately and updated regularly on Bromcom. At least two emergency contact details are held for each child and are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure information remains current.

Health, Safety and Hygiene

The setting adheres fully to all EYFS health, safety and hygiene requirements, ensuring children's wellbeing is safeguarded at all times. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and are effectively implemented in daily practice to manage hazards and maintain a safe learning environment.

Paediatric First Aid

Each EYFS class has a trained paediatric first aider on site at all times, ensuring that prompt and appropriate first aid support is available to children whenever required.

Safer Eating

A trained paediatric first aider is present during all mealtimes to ensure children's safety while eating. Information relating to allergies, intolerances and dietary requirements is collected, recorded and followed consistently. All staff complete annual food hygiene training, and food is prepared, handled and supervised safely in line with EYFS requirements.

Staffing Ratios & Supervision

EYFS staff-to-child ratios consistently meet statutory requirements at all times, ensuring children are appropriately supervised and supported. Students and volunteers are not included in ratio calculations, and visitors, including parents, students and trainees, are never left unsupervised with children, maintaining a safe and secure learning environment.

Toileting, Changing and Privacy

Children's privacy and dignity are respected at all times during toileting and nappy changing. Cubicles and privacy screens or curtains are used appropriately to provide a discreet environment while maintaining safeguarding oversight. Children are supervised safely, with appropriate assistance provided where required to support their individual needs.

Safe Sleep

The Foundation Stage follows EYFS-compliant safe sleep guidance to support children's health and wellbeing. Children do not have scheduled sleep at school unless they are unwell, new to the setting or their complex medical needs affects their sleep patterns. Sleep and rest arrangements are carefully implemented to minimise risk and ensure the safety, comfort and wellbeing of

children who sleep or rest while at school following individual care plans and highlighted in their individual risk assessment.

Monitoring and Assessment

The Foundation Stage at Willow Dene is monitored in line with the rest of the school.

- Targets are set at a baseline meeting, once a child has been at Willow Dene for half a term. The targets are assessed at the annual review six months later. This then falls in line with the annual review cycle and targets are assessed on an annual basis with families and other professionals. These link to EHC plans. In addition, teachers set half yearly targets on each child's Learning Targets document. They support in celebrating learning and identifying next steps for both learning at home and at school. Learning targets are monitored by senior leaders.
- The Characteristics of Effective Learning document forms the basis of the Annual review report and meeting. This identifies the holistic progress children are making throughout their time in the EYFS.
- Teacher's make a Baseline assessment of children's skills and knowledge in the first 6 weeks of entering the setting using the Learning Journeys assessment framework. Evidence and observations are gathered throughout their time in EYFS using the Evidence for Learning app and before children transition from EYFS into Willow Dene Key stage 1, teachers will have recorded the knowledge and understanding that is secure and embedded using the Learning Journeys Assessment framework.
- Teachers receive observations and regular learning walks focussing on the school's 'Indicators of Outstanding Practice'.
- There is regular focus on 'Progress Children' within each class team, where targeted interventions are planned and monitored by senior leaders.
- Teachers complete a Pupil Passport and communication passport for each child.
- Each class team sets a Team Development Plan termly, setting out targets for the growth of skills in that team, according to the needs of the children.
- Foundation Stage teachers complete the EYFS Profile in the summer term, in line with statutory requirements. This looks at the progress of our children at the end of their Reception year in relation to the 17 early learning goals.
- Monitoring of practice, provision and outcomes in the EYFS at Willow Dene is undertaken by line managers with experience of the specific context of the Early Years as well as the needs of our children.

The Foundation Stage at Willow Dene serves as an ideal starting point for children at the beginning of their school journey. We put in place routines and strategies that promote children's independence, understanding and communication, and which they can build upon as they progress through the rest of the school. We work closely with the teachers in the other Key Stages, sharing best practice and signposting, whilst maintaining those facets of the Foundation Stage curriculum that are unique to children's earliest years.

Conclusion

The Early Years Foundation Stage at Willow Dene is a positive environment where we work according the following principles:

- We work toward Independence.
- We respect the children in our care as individuals.
- We focus on what children *can* do, not what they can't.
- We give children lots of time to respond, to process, to think.
- We get to know our children's responses extremely well.
- We adapt the EYFS to fit the varying needs of our children.



And finally, we have fun! If we do, the children will too.