



Little Squirrels 'Teaching and learning' approach

Written in accordance with the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2025): Learning & development requirements:

1.1 This section sets out what providers must do, working in partnership with parents and/or carers, to promote the learning and development of all children in their care, and to ensure their entire early years' experience contributes positively to their brain development and readiness for Key Stage 1. The learning and development requirements are informed by the best available evidence on how children learn. They also reflect the broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes children need as foundations for life now and in the future. Early years providers must guide the development of children's capabilities to help ensure that children in their care will fully benefit from future opportunities.

1.2 The EYFS learning and development requirements for group and school-based providers are made up of the seven areas of learning and development, as set out in the educational programmes described below.

1.4 There are seven areas of learning and development that set out what providers must teach the children in their settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected.

1.5 Three prime areas are particularly important for learning and forming relationships. They build a foundation for children to thrive and provide the basis for learning in all areas.

These are the prime areas: • Communication and language • Physical development • Personal, social and emotional development

1.6 Providers must also support children in four specific areas, which help strengthen and develop the three prime areas, and ignite children's curiosity and enthusiasm.

The specific areas are: • Literacy • Mathematics • Understanding the world • Expressive arts and design

Learning and Development Considerations

1.12 Practitioners should be ambitious for all children. To do this they must consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each child in their care. They must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development. Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to ensure a strong foundation for children's development in the three prime areas. The specific areas of learning provide children with a broad curriculum and with opportunities to strengthen and apply the prime areas of learning. This is particularly important in developing language and extending vocabulary.

Acting on concerns

1.13 Throughout the early years, if a provider is worried about a child's progress in any prime area, practitioners must discuss this with the child's parents and/or carers and agree how to support the child. Practitioners must consider whether a child needs any additional support, including whether they may have a special educational need or disability which requires specialist support. English as an Additional Language

1.16 This framework does not prescribe a particular teaching approach. Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals, and solve problems. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play and learning that is guided by adults. Practitioners need to decide what they want children in their setting to learn, and the most effective ways to teach it. Practitioners must stimulate children's interests, responding to each child's emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions coupled with secure routines for play and learning.

1.18 In planning and guiding what children learn, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately.

Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- 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.

Curriculum Guidance

1.20 Development Matters, government curriculum guidance for the EYFS, can support providers to deliver the EYFS learning and development requirements. It can be used to design an effective early years curriculum. This guidance is non-statutory, so Ofsted,

CMAs, and inspectorates of independent schools will not take this into account when carrying out inspections or quality assurance visits. It is up to providers to decide how they deliver the learning and development requirements.

Section 2 – Assessment

2.1 Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. This section sets out the assessment requirements group and school-based providers must meet, as well as guidance on assessment.

2.2 Assessment should not involve long breaks from interaction with children or require excessive paperwork. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement. Practitioners are not required to prove this through collection of any physical evidence.

2.3 Practitioners should keep parents and/or carers up to date with their child’s progress and development. Practitioners should address any learning and development needs in partnership with parents and/or carers, and any relevant professionals.

2.5 Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners understanding children’s interests and what they know and can do, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge. In their interactions with children, practitioners should make and act on their own day-to-day observations about children’s progress and observations that parents and carers share. However, there is no requirement to keep written records in relation to this.

The EYFS

The EYFS sets out 4 guiding principles that should shape early years practice.

- ♥ Every child is a **unique child**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- ♥ Children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**.
- ♥ Children learn and develop well in **enabling environments** with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- ♥ Importance of **learning and development**. Children develop and learn at different rates. (See “the characteristics of effective teaching and learning” at paragraph 1.18). The framework covers the education and care of all children, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The EYFS framework is mandatory for all early year’s providers. This document sets out the requirements that must be met. Section 1 and 2 of the framework are the learning and development and the assessment requirements, section 3 is safeguarding. We are regulated by Ofsted who will monitor how well we are meeting the EYFS framework requirements. [Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage for group and school providers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/statutory-framework-for-the-early-years-foundation-stage-for-group-and-school-providers.pdf)

There are **7 areas of learning and development** which set out what we must teach the children in the setting. All areas are important and interconnected.

The 3 prime areas are Communication and language, Physical development, Personal, social, and emotional development. These areas build the foundation for children to thrive and provide the basis for learning in all areas.

The 4 specific areas are Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the world and Expressive arts and design. These areas support and strengthen the prime areas and ignite children’s curiosity and enthusiasm.

At Little Squirrels we use a document called **Development matters**. This is the **EYFS non statutory guidance** that shows us how children learn and develop, and how we support this by providing high quality care and learning in the setting. Instead of focusing on age bands there are developmental checkpoints to help us to track children’s development stages. Practitioners also use this to gain more knowledge of what the children should be learning and ideas for their next steps (teachable moments) [Development Matters - Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/statutory-framework-for-the-early-years-foundation-stage-for-group-and-school-providers.pdf)

In the moment planning

At Little Squirrels we do our planning ‘In the moment’, this means we do not do any forward planning, it is all done in the moment while engaging with the children. This allows practitioners to be more present with the children, and not stuck doing lots of unnecessary paperwork. The key is for practitioners to get to know their key children very well, by observing them, playing with them, communicating with them, talking to their parents about their interests at home, and parent communication sheets. Gaining knowledge of their cultural capital and using it to provide the child with the experiences they need. By doing this they have the knowledge of where they are developing and what their next steps are. Children are curious and learn best through play, this is when the team will use their knowledge of the child’s developmental stage and will step in when it is appropriate to extend their play by providing a ‘teachable moment’. The benefit of a teachable moment is to move their learning forward in a short space of time. Children make the most progress and their brains are the most stimulated when they are doing something that interests them.

Every week each key person will have a ‘focus child’. At the start of a new term, parents will have a letter sent home asking for some information on anything special or exciting happening at home for their child’s

key person to know - such as birthdays, family celebrations, house moves or any wow moments. Parents can write down any questions they would like to find out about their child's progress and development or any other information they would like to share or ask. Parents will also be able to send photos to the nursery email address, of what the child has been up to at home (this can be of ANYTHING, it does not have to be of an outing, it can just simply be a picture of the child's bedroom/pet etc). Once the photos are printed off, the child can share their experiences with their friends/staff during group times. This also allows staff to link the child's learning experiences at home to nursery.

How will staff meet the developmental needs of their focus children:

- ♥ At the start of the week, identify who their focus child is going to be.
- ♥ Read their parent letter that has been returned & print any photo's sent in from home.
- ♥ Staff will record what their intent is going to be, with their focus child at the top of their learning journey sheet.
- ♥ Staff will spend time specifically with their focus child, observing, assessing, and extending the child's development.
- ♥ Staff will make meaningful observations, looking at all of our assessment criteria.
- ♥ Document this all on the child's individual learning journey sheet, with snapshot photo's. Staff will ensure the 'teaching' is recorded as well as the outcome.
- ♥ This will evidence how the child has made progress in a short space of time.
- ♥ Once completed this will go into the child's individual learning journey.

By having a focus child, it allows staff's engagement with children to be more meaningful, tailored and personal. We have found that children make progress much faster using this approach.

Environment

Little squirrels provide a stimulating and homely calm environment. Children should feel comfortable in their environment to allow them the freedom, curiosity, and imagination to explore. We allow the children to be independent in their own learning, being able to access resources without the need for an adult, encouraging children to feel in control of their own learning. We provide engaging, real, and open-ended resources for our children to play and explore with, which we believe will stimulate their brain and open-up so many different learning opportunities. Practitioners will set up the room with invitations to play to give some prompts for learning opportunities. The practitioners will also be on hand at all times to give support or to encourage learning opportunities. Every room includes **continuous provision** which are our **core resources**, these will support all areas of the EYFS. These are then enhanced using **invitations to play** and **teachable moments** according to the children's interests at the time.

Continuous provision resources for **all rooms** include:

- ♥ Paper, Pencils, Colouring pencils, Pens, Paint, Paint brushes, scissors, Glue.
- ♥ Play dough or clay.
- ♥ Water & Sand
- ♥ Music
- ♥ Small world
- ♥ Loose parts
- ♥ Building – Lego, Wooden blocks, Stickle bricks, Magnetic tiles.
- ♥ Transport toys.
- ♥ Quiet area – books, blankets, cushions.
- ♥ Toddlers & babies, An area for physical exploration.
- ♥ Dress up
- ♥ Kitchen

- ♥ Babies/dolls
- ♥ Technology
- ♥ Junk modelling

Outdoor play is very important at Little Squirrels, children still have the same learning opportunities and resources will still meet all areas of the EYFS.

The outdoor provision includes different areas for the children to explore in.

- ♥ Construction area
- ♥ Digging pit
- ♥ Mud kitchen
- ♥ Growing area
- ♥ Playdough/clay.
- ♥ Sand/water play
- ♥ Creative/mark making
- ♥ Minibeast area
- ♥ Climbing equipment

Each room has a **'learning journey wall'** where meaningful group learning is displayed. Allowing practitioners and the children to reflect on the learning they have shared together, **'wow moments'** and **'proud clouds'** are displayed. We also display wow moments and proud clouds to celebrate the child's achievements. This promotes the children's self-confidence and pride. Each half term the observations and 'wow moments' are taken down and put in the children's personal learning journeys and evaluated to track their development, ensuring practitioners can identify any gaps in the children's development.

Acting on concerns

If there was a cause for concern in the child's development, practitioners would make the following steps to support the need and monitor the cause of concern:

- ♥ Specific, detailed observations would be made to get more on an understanding of what the child needs support with. The key person would seek advice from the special educational needs coordinator, for support and advice.
- ♥ Early support tracking documents would be used for all areas of learning, to identify specifically where and what the delay is & what the child needs support with.
- ♥ A meeting with parents would be arranged to discuss the concerns and area of need. Parents can discuss their opinions and views with the child's key person.
- ♥ Appropriate activities and strategies would be put into place, to support the child with meeting the 'gaps' in their development.
- ♥ The activities and strategies would then be evaluated and reviewed at an arranged parent meeting, where new activities and strategies would be set if needed.
- ♥ If the child's key person felt that the child was still making little or no progress, we would seek appropriate, professional advice, with parent's permission.
- ♥ Practitioners would follow the graduated response (See SEN policy) [The SEND Graduated Response | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Involving parents in their child's learning

Parents/carers are the main teacher in their child's learning, this is why it is so important to work in partnership with parents.

We have a parent friendly version of the EYFS called **'What to expect when'** which is sent to parents when their children start the setting, and then before every parent evening. This is emailed out so that parents

have an electronic copy. [What-to-expect-in-the-EYFS-complete-FINAL-16.09-compressed.pdf](https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/what-to-expect-in-the-EYFS-complete-FINAL-16.09-compressed.pdf) ([foundationyears.org.uk](https://www.foundationyears.org.uk))

The **'What to expect when'** document explains the learning and development stages of each age group, it also has parent ideas to support their child's learning at home. This gives the parents an idea of where their child is at in their development.

Every term parents will have the opportunity to come to a parents evening, where they can look through their child's learning journey and walk around the nursery to see what their child has been up to over the last term. Parents can make a 10-minute time slot with their child's key person to discuss any information or concerns regarding their child and their development.

If parents have any concerns or would like to speak to their child's key person before there is an allocated open evening, they can arrange a meeting with their child's key person.

Assessment

At little Squirrels, we find it more valuable spending time with the children rather than doing lots of paperwork, meaning practitioners have time to get to know their children on a deeper level. We ensure our practitioners are confident with their knowledge of child development, allowing them to use their **professional judgement**. We ensure this by regular training, staff meetings and continuous use of the developmental checkpoints supported by the **Development matters framework**. This means that when asked about a child and their stage of development our practitioners will know without having to refer to a learning journey.

Our practitioners communicate with parents daily about their child's day, any new learning opportunities they have experienced, and anything we are working on.

All children have a learning journey of the progress children have made as we feel this is nice for our parents to look back on and to refresh our memory of the progress the child has made.

Early support tracking documents are used when practitioners feel a child may not be meeting their developmental checkpoints to see if any further support is needed from the SENCO.

There are many foundations that underpin our Assessment process, to ensure we are meeting the needs of all the children to their full potential. These include:

Characteristics of effective learning

The Characteristics of Effective Learning describe behaviours children use in order to learn. To learn well, children must approach opportunities with curiosity, energy and enthusiasm. Effective learning must be meaningful to a child, so that they are able to use what they have learned and apply it in new situations. These abilities and attitudes of strong learners will support them to learn well and make good progress in all the Areas of Learning and Development.

When supporting a child's learning and development, it is very important that we understand how children learn, these are called the **'characteristics of effective learning'**. By knowing what type of learner the child is, it allows practitioners to guide and extend activities, while adapting the environment suitably, to ensure the child can gain the best possible outcomes.

The three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- ♥ 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 do this by having a Characteristics of effective learning sheet in the child's learning journey folder, we monitor it closely after making observations on the children and highlight the learning we have observed. We then identify what type of learner the child is at the end of each term on their parent review sheet, by sharing what kind of play, learning and thinking has been observed. This is then shared with parents at parents evening.

[Overview – Characteristics of Effective Learning, and Areas of Learning and Development – Birth To 5 Matters](#)

Schemas (Repeated patterns of behaviour)

Chris Athey's work on schemas has been influential in helping adults understand the importance of repetition in children's learning. Athey defines a schema as **"a pattern of repeatable behaviour into which experiences are assimilated and that are gradually co-ordinated. Co-ordinations lead to higher level and more powerful schemas."**

We observe our children's repetitive patterns to identify their individual schemas. When you are aware of schemas and understand the concept of these repeated behaviours, it allows you to plan ahead and meet the learning needs of the child. An example of a schema is 'a baby continuously dropping something from their high chair & an adult returning the object several times' – This is a babies brain learning about movement, space, the up and down motion, gravity & so much more; this falls under 'trajectory'.

At Little Squirrels assess children learning patterns by making quality observations when the children are engaged. We use the 9 Schemas to support the way we plan for a child's learning and development.

These are:

- ♥ Connection
- ♥ Transforming
- ♥ Orientation
- ♥ Trajectory
- ♥ Rotation
- ♥ Enveloping
- ♥ Enclosing
- ♥ Positioning
- ♥ Transporting

Staff identify children's schemas by:

- ♥ Making quality observations of the children's play and their behaviours throughout the day.
- ♥ Using a diagram/map to link which schemas the children are currently going through in their classrooms (some children will be going through the same schemas at the same time)
- ♥ Once the schemas are identified, staff will adapt their continuous provision accordingly, or set up invitations to play that allow the children to engage in their play pattern.
- ♥ This can then be evidenced through photographs, which will be added to their learning journeys or the classroom learning journeys.

By allowing many opportunities for children to engage in their fascinations and interests, a deeper level of engagement and learning will happen throughout our setting.

[schemas.pdf \(birthto5matters.org.uk\)](https://birthto5matters.org.uk/schemas.pdf)

Leuven scale – Levels of involvement for well-being and engagement – Assessments

Children's well-being is a priority, if children are not confident and settled, they cannot engage and learn.

We have found the most useful way to make these assessments is by using the Leuven scale. It is an assessment tool which was created by psychologists to effectively assess children's well-being and engagement levels in education.

By using the Leuven scale it allows us to look at the children individually and make quality observations; meaning we can start interventions early if the child requires support.

Practitioners will do this by:

- Making observations on their key children when they are in different play scenarios and engagements at the setting.
- Staff will use the Leuven scale assessment sheets we have created once a term, alongside the focus child learning journey sheet.
- Staff will reflect on the observations made, thinking about what was working well & whether they think their key children require extra support.

Practitioners will be assessing:

- How engaged the children are in independent play & adult led activities
- How does the child engage & interact with other children and members of staff
- The Children's emotions and social development.
- The child's energy levels and involvement

By looking at the above it also allows practitioners to assess their practice. We use the Leuven scale as an evaluation tool on adult led activities, interactions, and teachable moments. Once a term staff will evaluate the children's level of involvement throughout the term and determine what sparks the child's engagement the most and which activities they show the highest levels of engagement.

Policy updated by Kylie Jones and the Little Squirrels team **May 2026**.