



Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest
Assessment Policy
(Birth to 5 Matters 2nd Edition 2026)

Aims of Assessment

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we believe that assessment is a vital tool to support each child's learning and development. Our assessment practices are informed by Birth to 5 Matters Second Edition (2026), non-statutory guidance which supports implementation of the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage. Assessment is holistic, inclusive, relationship-based and play-based. We use the guidance alongside our professional knowledge of child development, the individual child and their context; it is not used as an assessment checklist. Assessment helps us understand each child's development and progress, shape responsive curriculum and provision, and work in partnership with families and other professionals.

Our assessment policy aims to:

- Support children's individual learning journeys through ongoing, formative assessment.
- Build a rich picture of each child's development across all areas of the EYFS.
- Involve children and their families as active participants in assessment.
- Ensure that assessment is meaningful, not burdensome, and supports professional decision-making.
- Promote equity and anti-bias practice through reflective and inclusive approaches.

Principles of Assessment (Aligned with Birth to 5 Matters)

Our assessments follow these principles outlined in Birth to 5 Matters:

- **Respect for the child:** Children are seen as competent learners.
- **Relationship-based:** Learning is observed and assessed through warm, trusting relationships.
- **Play-based:** Learning is embedded in play and real experiences.
- **Meaningful rather than data-driven:** Assessment is primarily formative, descriptive and rooted in professional knowledge of the child. Numerical information or screening outcomes may contribute where appropriate, but do not replace professional judgement or reduce children to scores, levels or checklists.
- **Reflective:** Involves practitioner reflection and informed professional judgment.
- **Developmentally appropriate:** Based on the non-linear, holistic development of children.

Our Guiding Principles (Aligned with Birth to 5 Matters)

We are guided by the following key principles:

- Assessment primarily supports learning, curriculum decision-making and understanding children's development.
- Observation is central to understanding each unique child.
- Assessment should be broad and narrative, not tick-list-based.
- Children's interests, identities, cultures and voices must be visible in assessments.
- Practitioners' professional judgement is trusted and supported.

Assessment Across Early Childhood

Assessment approaches reflect children's developmental stage and recognise that effective observation and assessment may look different across early childhood. These phases support professional thinking and are not used as rigid age-related checklists.

Birth – 2

Assessment is particularly rooted in responsive relationships, attachment, care routines, movement, sensory exploration, communication and practitioners' close knowledge of children's cues and responses.

Two year olds

Assessment increasingly considers communication, exploration, schemas, relationships, physical development, autonomy, co-regulation and emerging independence.

Three – four year olds

Assessment considers children's growing knowledge, communication, sustained thinking, relationships, independence, creativity and their ability to connect and apply learning through play and first-hand experiences.

Reception and beyond

Practitioners understand how children's experiences and development at Sir James Knott Nursery School provide foundations for their next stage, without bringing later curriculum expectations down into Nursery.

Across all phases, practitioners combine knowledge of child development with what they know about the individual child, their family, culture, community, experiences, interests, schemas and starting points.

Assessment Procedures

On Entry:

Initial baseline observations during the first 6 weeks, focusing on the Characteristics of Effective Learning and Prime Areas of Development.

Parent/carers input gathered through home visits or settling-in open events.

Ongoing Formative Assessment:

Our core assessment process is embedded in everyday interactions:

- Practitioners engage in purposeful observation of children as they play, explore, and interact.

Observations may be:

- Spontaneous or planned
- Individual or group-based
- Written, photographic, or audio/visual
- Through room floor books

Practitioners note:

- What the child is doing or saying
- Levels of involvement and well-being
- Possible learning or development taking place
- Links to the child's interests, culture, or prior experience

These observations inform responsive planning and environmental adjustments.

Assessment, Curriculum and Provision

Assessment informs curriculum decision-making. Practitioners consider: What do we know? → So what? → What will we change? → Where will we see this within provision? → What difference has it made?

Assessment may lead to changes in adult interaction, continuous provision, purposeful enhancements, the learning environment, routines, targeted support or reasonable adjustments. It should not automatically result in an individual adult-led activity or written 'next step'.

Practitioners also attend to children's interests, fascinations and schemas; patterns in play, exploration and thinking; and significant changes in communication, participation, engagement or independence.

Birth to 5 Matters developmental Ranges and pathways may support professional reflection and best-fit judgements, but individual statements are not used as a checklist or as a sequence of targets.

Summative Assessments:

- Conducted termly through review of learning journals, key person reflections, and professional discussion.
- Outcomes are summarised in narrative form, covering the child's development across the Prime and Specific areas.
- At identified assessment points, practitioners contribute to Pupil Progress and Curriculum Reflection, drawing on their knowledge of individual children and the cohort. Professional dialogue identifies strengths, patterns, emerging needs and potential barriers to learning. This informs curriculum priorities, continuous provision, purposeful enhancements, adult interactions and, where appropriate, targeted or individualised support. The impact of these responses is reviewed at the next assessment point.
- Shared with parents/carers and used to inform planning and support.

Transition to Reception / Other Settings

- A copy of the child's yearly report is created and shared with the new class teacher of each child.
- This includes key strengths, interests, dispositions, and areas for further development.
- Practitioners meet with receiving teachers through school-to-school visits. (where possible).

Inclusion and Equalities

- We are committed to equity, inclusion, and anti-discriminatory practice. Our assessment practices reflect and uphold every child's right to be recognised, understood, and supported as an individual within a diverse community. We ensure that assessment is used to celebrate each child's unique identity and learning pathway, not to compare or label.

Inclusive Practice in Assessment

- Assessment is rooted in knowledge of the whole child, including their cultural, linguistic, physical, and emotional context.
- We recognise that children may express learning in diverse ways, and we value multiple forms of communication (verbal, non-verbal, creative, physical).
- Practitioners are aware of and actively challenge bias or deficit thinking in the interpretation of observations or progress.

Equity Over Equality

- We recognise that equal treatment does not always lead to equal outcomes.
- Assessment is adapted to meet individual needs, including: Children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), Children from minority ethnic or marginalised backgrounds, Children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

- We use assessment to ensure barriers to learning are identified and addressed early, with appropriate, timely support.

Anti-Bias Approach

In line with *Birth to 5 Matters*, our assessments:

- Avoid assumptions based on gender, class, disability, race, or language.
- Challenge stereotypes and promote a positive self-identity for all children.
- Reflect diverse cultures, family structures, and life experiences.

Culturally Sensitive Practice

- We value the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of our families.
- Assessment considers how children's learning and development may be influenced by cultural norms and expectations.
- We involve parents and carers in culturally respectful ways, ensuring their knowledge and views are central to understanding their child.

Accessibility and Communication

- Assessment information is shared with families using accessible formats and clear language.
- Where needed, we provide translation, interpretation, or visual support to ensure families understand and can contribute meaningfully.
- We ensure children with communication difficulties or sensory needs are assessed using appropriate and sensitive approaches.

Staff Training and Reflection

- Staff engage in ongoing training to develop anti-bias awareness and inclusive assessment skills.

Reflective practice is used to:

- Identify unconscious bias.
- Ensure assessments do not reflect stereotypes or low expectations.
- Improve how we recognise and celebrate different ways of knowing, learning, and being.

Children's Voice and Agency

Children's perspectives are an important part of assessment. Child voice extends beyond spoken language and may be communicated through choices, actions, gestures, expressions, play, behaviour, interests and responses. Particular consideration is given to babies, non-speaking children and children with SEND so that their communication can influence decisions about their experiences and provision.

SEND and Small-Step Progress

For children with SEND or children following an individual developmental pathway, assessment focuses on progress from individual starting points. Where appropriate, the school uses the Cherry Garden SEND Assessment Framework and Branch Maps alongside its curriculum to identify and celebrate smaller and lateral steps of progress. Assessment recognises progress in engagement, communication, interaction, independence, regulation and participation and is not limited to chronological age-related expectations.

Communication and Language Screening – WellComm

WellComm is used as an additional screening tool to support identification of speech, language and communication strengths and needs. During 2026–27, WellComm screening is being extended across the cohort. Outcomes inform universal provision, targeted support, discussion with families and, where appropriate, referral to external professionals. WellComm complements rather than replaces ongoing assessment and professional judgement.

Digital Documentation

Digital tools may support documentation and communication, but should not interrupt high-quality adult–child interactions or create unnecessary workload. The quantity of photographs, observations or digital records is not a measure of the quality of assessment.

Working in Partnership

- We work collaboratively with families and external professionals (e.g., SENDCo, speech and language therapists) to ensure assessments are accurate, supportive, and inclusive.
- Assessment is a shared process, not a judgement on the child or family.

Role of the Key Person

- The key person plays a crucial role in assessment, forming a secure attachment with the child and building strong, trusting relationships with families. Informed by the guidance in *Birth to 5 Matters*, the key person is best placed to understand and interpret a child's development through everyday interactions and meaningful relationships.
- The key person provides emotional security and continuity, which are essential for effective learning and observation.
- A strong relationship enables the child to express their thoughts, interests, and needs openly creating a richer basis for assessment.
- The key person observes the child in context, during play, interactions, and routines.

- Observations focus on the whole child, including emotional well-being, social relationships, communication, and learning behaviours- not just developmental outcomes.
- Through daily interactions, the key person develops deep insight into the child's interests, strengths, needs, and developmental pathways.
- They use professional judgement, supported by *Birth to 5 Matters* guidance, to assess learning without relying on checklists or narrow data tracking.
- The key person is responsible for collecting and curating purposeful documentation (e.g., photos, narrative observations, child voice).
- They maintain the child's Learning Journal or portfolio, ensuring it reflects the child's identity, voice, and progress over time.
- The key person forms strong partnerships with parents and carers, sharing assessments and valuing family contributions.
- They gather information about the child's learning and interests at home to inform a holistic picture of development.
- Using their observations and knowledge, the key person helps plan responsive, play-based experiences that build on the child's interests and needs.
- They adapt provision to ensure it is inclusive and challenging for the individual child.
- The key person shares observations and insights with colleagues in team discussions and planning meetings.
- They take part in peer moderation and reflective practice to maintain consistency and develop their own assessment skills.
- The key person plays a central role in supporting the child during transitions, preparing meaningful transition summaries and sharing knowledge with receiving staff or settings.
- They ensure transitions are child-centred and smooth, maintaining continuity of care and understanding.

Family Partnership

- We recognise that parents and carers are children's first and most enduring educators. In line with the guidance in *Birth to 5 Matters*, we value parents as active partners in the assessment process and involve them meaningfully in understanding and supporting their child's development.

We foster strong, two-way communication by:

- Holding regular meetings and informal discussions about children's learning.
- Sharing learning journals, observations, and progress summaries in accessible formats.
- Using photos, stories, or home observations contributed by parents to enrich the child's assessment record.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Senior leaders monitor the quality and impact of assessment through Pupil Progress and Curriculum Reflection, professional dialogue and moderation, learning walks, provision

and environment monitoring, SEND monitoring, parent/carers voice, staff confidence and consideration of how assessment is shaping curriculum, provision and children's experiences.

- Senior leaders review assessment practice to ensure consistency and quality.
- The impact of assessment is monitored through staff meetings, moderation, and professional development.

Professional Development

Practitioners engage in:

- Regular reflection and training on observation and assessment, this will be carried out through staff meeting or external agency training.
- Peer moderation to build shared understanding and confidence
- Use *Birth to 5 Matters* as a flexible guide, not a checklist.

The Policy is reviewed annually with staff and governor input.

Signed:	
Headteacher:	J. Croft
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