GLC Growing Little Champions

All Different: All Equal: Together, Improving Upon Our Best

Our Littlest Champions

A thoughtful curriculum for children under two

DOCUMENT 01 / THE CURRICULUM

What we want our youngest children to learn, know, experience and increasingly be able to do. The accompanying Practitioner Handbook explains how we deliver it.

UNDER-TWOS • SEPTEMBER 2026 • ENGLAND EYFS

01 / PURPOSE

What is our curriculum?

Our curriculum defines what matters in children's learning; the handbook defines how adults put it into practice.

At Growing Little Champions, our curriculum is the deliberately chosen knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences we want babies and toddlers to develop. It includes learning through relationships, care, movement, exploration, play and talk. It is more than a themed activity plan or a list of developmental milestones.

It is rooted in the seven educational programmes of the statutory EYFS, with an ambitious focus on the three interconnected prime areas in the under-two room. Learning is sequenced through small, meaningful steps and adapted to each child's individual starting point [1, 2].

Our core principles

Belong

Security, predictable relationships and responsive care create the conditions for learning.

Communicate

Every gaze, movement, gesture, vocalisation and word is meaningful and deserves a response.

Move

Adults intentionally support body awareness, movement and physical confidence.

Explore

Real objects, sensory experiences and repeated investigation are valued.

Participate

Children develop agency and independence within respectful care routines.

Connect

Families' languages, stories and interests shape curriculum content.

A curriculum designed for babies, not a mini-school

Our curriculum offers structure without rushing children into adult-led tasks. A baby may learn through watching, touching or listening; a young toddler may repeat an action over many days. Progress includes the gradual strengthening of attention, trust, understanding, movement and independent choices. Children with SEND follow an ambitious, adapted pathway, not a reduced entitlement.

What we intend children to learn

The prime areas are the foundation of the programme, supported by rich experiences across all seven EYFS areas.

Area of learning	Curricular ambition for under-twos	Building blocks we intentionally develop
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	"I am safe, known and able to express what I need."	Secure relationships; recognition of feelings; co-regulation; agency; early belonging; shared experiences.
Communication & Language	"I am heard and understand more of the world around me."	Attention and listening; shared attention; sounds and gestures; first meaningful vocabulary; early turn-taking.
Physical Development	"I move and act with growing confidence."	Freedom to move; balance; coordination; grasp and release; tool exploration; early self-care.
Four specific areas	"I explore stories, patterns, people and possibilities."	Books and rhymes; quantities, shapes and spatial concepts; the natural world; art, music, movement and expression.

Teaching as a purposeful interaction

In the moment planning is how adults respond to real interest; it does not mean leaving learning to chance. Practitioners use their knowledge of child development and individual starting points to decide what to model, repeat, introduce or help children practise. The curriculum remains ambitious while the pathway stays flexible [2, 5].

The quality we seek

Children show secure engagement, growing understanding, meaningful communication, confidence to explore and success within personally appropriate next steps. We judge this from what children consistently do and understand in familiar situations, not from the number of activities or photographs completed.

03 / PRIME AREA

Personal, Social & Emotional Development

Curricular goal: I belong, I am safe and I can increasingly express my needs.

Learning thread	Early experiences	Next possibilities / teaching focus
Trust and attachment	Recognises familiar voices and faces; seeks closeness and reassurance.	Anticipates the arrival of key person; participates in predictable separations and reunions; begins to explore securely.
Co-regulation and feelings	Communicates discomfort, interest and pleasure through body, face and sound.	Notices and uses familiar calming routines; accepts adult naming and modelling of feelings; begins to make choices.
Self and others	Experiences responsive face-to-face exchanges and shared enjoyment.	Recognises own name and familiar people; starts parallel exploration and early social turn-taking.
Agency and independence	Shows preferences for people, objects, sounds, places and routines.	Indicates a choice; actively helps with washing, dressing or tidying; repeats an action for mastery.

What we deliberately give children

- A named key person who knows their communication, routines, family and comfort strategies.
- Respectful, unhurried care; emotionally available adults; simple consistent language for feelings.
- Mirrors, family photographs, familiar objects, repeated greeting rituals and social games.

What successful learning can look like

A child signals that they want comfort and accepts co-regulation; watches a friend's play; anticipates a comforting phrase; or begins to participate in putting an arm into a sleeve. These examples show possible progress, not universal deadlines.

04 / PRIME AREA

Communication & Language

Curricular goal: My attempts to communicate are understood, respected and extended.

Learning thread	Early experiences	Next possibilities / teaching focus
Connection and attention	Turns towards voices; notices faces and environmental sounds; engages in shared attention.	Sustains back-and-forth exchanges through looks, smiles, gestures and sounds; attends to short, meaningful language.
Understanding	Recognises own name, familiar words and everyday routines supported by gesture.	Responds to meaningful short requests; anticipates songs; points, looks or acts to show understanding.
Expressive communication	Coos, babbles, vocalises and gestures to communicate.	Uses more purposeful gestures/signs, meaningful words and—when ready—combinations of words.
Enjoying language	Responds to repeated rhymes, expressive faces and familiar books.	Joins in by movement, sound, gesture or word; enjoys naming, anticipating and repeating language.

The centrality of vocabulary

We intentionally teach useful words in a meaningful context: familiar people; care routines; actions; objects; feelings; relationships and early concepts. Adults respond to non-verbal communication first, then model the word naturally: "You found the ball. Roll, roll." Home languages, signs, visual supports and objects of reference are welcomed and actively used where appropriate.

The Growing Little Champions Communication Tree (reproduced later in this document) represents our five mutually reinforcing practices: social communication, collaborative talk, interactive reading, explicit modelling of vocabulary and modelling of language.

05 / PRIME AREA

Physical Development

Curricular goal: My body is capable; I have time and space to move, practise and participate.

Learning thread	Early experiences	Next possibilities / teaching focus
Large movement	Reaches, rolls, pivots, sits or crawls according to individual ability.	Changes position intentionally; cruises, walks, climbs or runs when ready; gains balance and control.
Fine motor control	Grasps, transfers and explores objects with hands and mouth safely.	Releases with control; posts, stacks, fills, empties; uses spoon, brush, crayon or tongs where appropriate.
Body awareness	Experiences movement, touch and position through supervised floor exploration.	Anticipates movement games; adjusts posture and effort; follows simple body-part vocabulary.
Participation in care	Experiences respectful feeding, nappy changing, dressing and hygiene routines.	Offers hands, holds cup, helps with clothing or attempts washing, with adult supervision.

Movement is taught, not assumed

Adults create large safe movement spaces, observe how each child initiates movement and offer just enough support for the next possibility. We avoid placing children in positions they cannot achieve independently for prolonged periods. We adapt physical access for children with additional needs and plan outdoor movement daily. Ofsted's under-two research highlights the need for intentional support for physical development [5].

The four specific areas

Rich experiences are threaded through relationships, routines and play.

Literacy

Share books every day, name pictures, repeat nursery rhymes, make space for child-led book exploration and early mark-making. Children hear rich language and learn to value stories.

Mathematics

Model more, gone, in, out, full, empty, big, little; investigate stacking, sorting, posting, fitting, moving and repeating patterns. Revisit quantities in real routines.

Understanding the World

Observe weather, water, plants, animals and everyday objects; investigate cause and effect; celebrate family people, home languages and diverse communities.

Expressive Arts & Design

Explore movement, sound, rhythm, textures, marks, colour, singing and sensory materials. Adults model creative possibilities but value exploration over a finished product.

Characteristics of effective teaching and learning

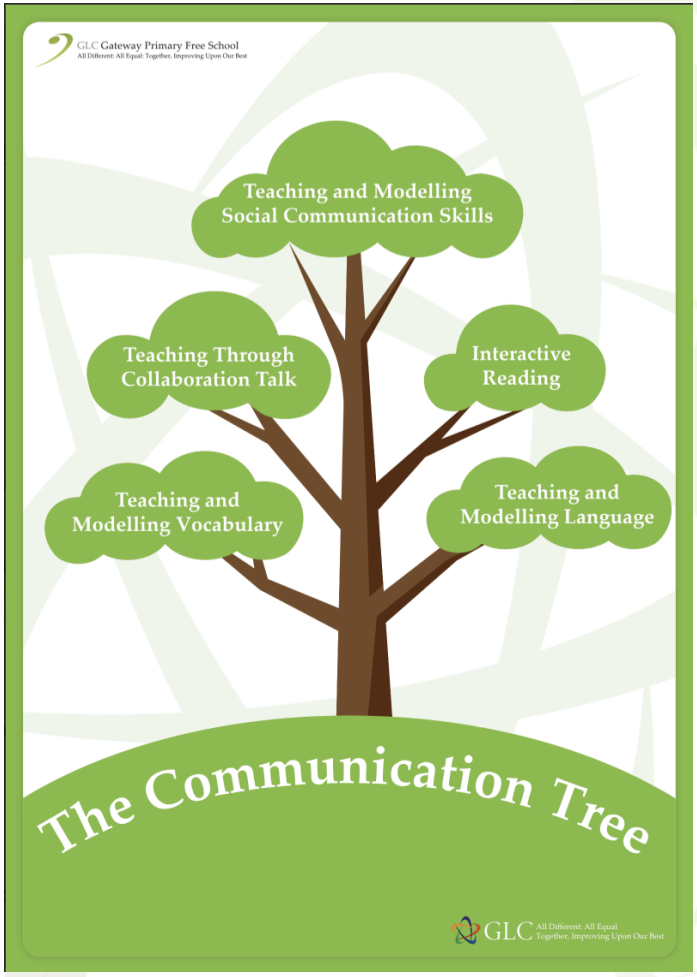
We protect time for playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically. Children learn to investigate, persist, make connections and try another way. Adults are attuned to the child's developmental stage and offer an appropriate challenge without taking control.

A few examples of learning across areas

A child repeatedly fills and empties a basket: language (in/out), mathematics (capacity), physical development (grasp/release), PSED (persistence) and understanding the world (cause and effect). The adult notices the learning, models one idea and leaves room for the child to continue.

Our Communication Tree

These five branches inform language provision in every part of the day.



Five branches, one shared ambition

Teaching and modelling social communication skills
Warm face-to-face exchanges, gestures, joint attention and supported turn-taking.

Teaching through collaboration talk
Back-and-forth exchanges that connect adults, babies and peers; pauses for a response.

Interactive reading
Short daily books, pointing, naming, repetition and responding to the child's interest.

Teaching and modelling vocabulary
Repeated useful words linked to objects, actions, people and routines.

Teaching and modelling language
Natural commentary, short phrases and gentle extension of the child's own communication.

How learning happens

Our curriculum is intentional; our pedagogy is responsive.

In-the-moment planning

Watch what the child is trying to do; notice the knowledge or skill at work; respond with a word, demonstration, resource or carefully chosen challenge; reflect on what changed.

The environment as third teacher

Inspired by Reggio Emilia, we design beautiful, accessible, orderly spaces that invite sensory exploration, relationship and independence. The room is continually reviewed in light of children's responses.

Care is curriculum

Hellos, feeding, resting, washing, nappy changes and transitions are rich opportunities to teach security, communication, vocabulary, cooperation and independence.

Intentional repetition

Babies often need to repeat a sequence many times. Practitioners revisit a learning thread in different, meaningful contexts, rather than constantly introducing new activities.

Daily access and inclusion

Indoor and outdoor provision provides safe opportunities to explore and move. Adult support, sensory adaptations, communication approaches and accessible resources are adjusted so that babies with disabilities or developmental differences can participate. The learning environment is a resource for teaching, never a substitute for warm adult interaction.

Home, nursery and Play Passports

The six half-termly links build shared experiences; they do not displace individual learning priorities.

Half term	Theme	Core connections
Autumn 1	Who Am I?	People, identity, faces, belonging and early exchanges.
Autumn 2	Home Sweet Home	Home, routines, familiar objects, family and emotional security.
Spring 1	Our World	Sounds, places, materials, weather and sensory discovery.
Spring 2	Get Growing	Nature, change, plants, growth and curiosity.
Summer 1	Healthy Habits	Movement, nutrition, rest, hygiene and independence.
Summer 2	Music and Movement	Rhythm, gestures, listening, creative expression and coordination.

Why our Play Passports matter

Our six-week Play Passports share gentle play invitations, brain and language information, model words, play-and-rest prompts and spaces for photographs or notes. A key person invites information about current interests, home languages, routines and achievements. That information informs the learning environment, interactions and personalised next steps; families are never judged by whether they return a written page.

Best Start in Life connection

This approach reflects the government's Giving every child the best start in life strategy, which emphasises support for families and the quality of early education and care. It also draws on Ofsted's Best start in life research on the prime areas and responsive, knowledgeable practice [4–6].

Progression, inclusion and impact

How we recognise that the curriculum is helping every child learn.

What progress means for an individual child

Progress is learning that becomes more secure, flexible and meaningful. A child may sustain shared attention longer, use a familiar gesture to request more, change position confidently, repeat a new action or anticipate a care routine. We assess the child's own journey rather than assuming every child reaches a milestone on the same date.

The learning story we want to be able to tell

- What does this child know, understand and do now—and what matters next?
- What precise teaching, language, care experiences and environments help them develop?
- How is the child using learning over time in more than one context?
- What have the child's family and other professionals told us, and how did we act on it?
- How have we adapted provision so children with SEND and disadvantaged children thrive?

Our implementation is reviewed through

Knowledgeable key persons; high-quality interactions; children's wellbeing and engagement; ongoing observations and conversations; engagement with families; thoughtful environment changes and proportionate assessment. EY Log and observation routines are explained in the separate handbook. We do not treat activity counts, display work or printed paperwork as outcomes.

Our curriculum is rooted in the EYFS and informed by Development Matters, Ofsted's inspection and under-two research, and the DfE Best Start in Life strategy. It is reviewed with practitioners and families to maintain ambition and relevance [1–6].

11 / GOVERNANCE

Sources and status

FURTHER READING

Reference framework

Regulatory and research sources used to inform this document. Links are provided for review.

[1] DfE. EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers (in force 1 September 2026).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2

[2] DfE. Development Matters (non-statutory curriculum guidance).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2/development-matters

[3] Ofsted. Early years inspection information (for use from September 2026).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information/early-years-inspection-information-for-use-from-september-2026

[4] Ofsted. Best start in life: a research review for early years (parts 1–3).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years

[5] Ofsted. Getting it right from the start: how practitioners work with babies and toddlers (2025).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/getting-it-right-from-the-start-how-early-years-practitioners-work-with-babies-and-toddlers/getting-it-right-from-the-start-how-early-years-practitioners-work-with-babies-and-toddlers

[6] DfE. Giving every child the best start in life: government strategy (2025).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life

[7] DfE. Carrying out an assessment: what you need to know.

https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/support-for-practitioners/send-assessment/carrying-out-an-assessment

How these sources are used

The EYFS is statutory. Development Matters is non-statutory. Ofsted inspection guidance describes evaluation, not extra legal duties. The Best Start in Life strategy and research inform our rationale and professional practice; they do not prescribe the GLC documentation cycle. Our own weekly observations, use of EY Log and half-termly reporting are GLC systems.