



# BERKHAMPSTEAD SCHOOL

*The School's motto: "Perseverantia Vincit" meaning perseverance wins through, exemplifies the genuine ethos of striving for success in all aspects of school.*

## Early Years Policy

*All children deserve the care and support they need to have the best start in life. Children learn and develop at a faster rate from birth to five years old than at any other time in their lives, so their experiences in early years have a major impact on their future life chances.*

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, September 2026.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) applies to children from birth to the end of the Reception year. At Berkhamstead School, children can join the school Kindergarten once have turned 3 years of age. In partnership with parents and carers, we enable the children to begin the process of becoming active learners for life.

The EYFS is based upon four principles:

- 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. The framework covers the education and care of all children, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Early Years Department comprises of one Kindergarten class and two Reception classes. At times, we welcome Early Childhood students and teacher training students from the University of Gloucestershire working in the department alongside the staff. Other professionals may also work within the setting throughout the year. All parties will have an appropriate DBS certificate and will have undergone safeguarding induction.

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The EYFS staff plan and work together to ensure continuity and progression, providing age and stage related activities to suit all our children. Children are also taught within their year groups, they are taught in a variety of ways, in whole class groups, small group work, pairs and individually.

We recognise that starting school or Kindergarten can be challenging for young children and families. We therefore plan this time carefully to ensure it is as smooth as possible for each child and that they settle into their new class quickly and happily.

We are dedicated to providing excellent pastoral care and education to the children at Berkhamstead School. Staff are fully qualified, have a wide range of experience and expertise in working with and educating children. The staff are committed to professional development and attend up to date training courses. They have excellent knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and child development. In all classes, children are provided with a nurturing environment in which they are given opportunities to express themselves and extend their imagination.

Through planned play, young children learn about themselves and the world around them. They are encouraged to socialise and therefore develop personal, social and emotional skills. In our environment, we acknowledge the potential for learning in every activity and situation that may arise; our aim is to provide a secure and stimulating environment in which children flourish. The children at Berkhamstead School feel valued and are given the confidence to become active learners. There are well-planned areas of provision with a wide range of resources and enhanced materials available. Opportunities are provided for the teaching of skills, sustained activity and continuous provision, as well as spontaneous, self-chosen play. It is important to us that children experience success, take risks, have fun and enjoy themselves whilst learning.

### **EYFS Areas of Learning**

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a curriculum from birth to five years old. We follow the strands set by this curriculum and concentrate the learning opportunities on the seven areas of learning (3 Prime and 4 Specific) which are:

#### **Prime**

1. Personal Social and Emotional Development
2. Physical Development
3. Communication and Language

#### **Specific**

1. Literacy
2. Mathematics
3. Understanding of the World
4. Expressive Arts and Design

We believe that none of these areas can be delivered in isolation from the others and that they are equally important and depend on each other.

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All areas are delivered through a balance of adult led and child-initiated activities. Through play and practical experiences children learn about the world and their place in it. They learn through first hand experiences, talk, books and high-quality resources. We set realistic yet challenging expectations that meet the needs of our children. We achieve this by planning to meet the needs of children, children with special educational needs, children who are more able, children with disabilities, children from all social and cultural backgrounds, children of different ethnic groups and those from diverse linguistic backgrounds. As many activities as possible are play-based, often following teacher input; children gain essential knowledge and skills from their teacher. All activities are expertly modelled, and children are given sufficient time, support and resources to repeat and practise them.

Weaving throughout the EYFS curriculum at Berkhamstead School are three **Characteristics of Effective Learning**.

- **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

These elements underpin how we reflect on each child's development and adjust our practice accordingly. Supporting children in their individual learning behaviour and observing the context of children's play is essential.

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

The school fosters and develops relationships between home, school, and places of worship in order to make links stronger for the good of the community as a whole. Children are encouraged to learn to work, share, take turns and co-operate with others; be independent and make choices for themselves; be sensitive to the needs of others and to respect other cultures and beliefs. Children are enabled to become confident and develop a positive self-image.

### **Physical Development**

Children are given opportunities to move to music, use equipment, develop and practise their fine and gross motor skills to build strength, agility and dexterity. They develop an increasing understanding of how their body works and what is needed to be healthy. This is done in both indoors and outdoors and by working with a wide range of resources. Our specialist PE teacher delivers structured lessons to the children each week focusing on different skills for example, gymnastics, ball skills and team games.

### **Communication and Language**

This covers all aspects of language development and provides the foundation for literacy and oracy skills. We focus on developing children's competence in speaking and listening. To extend and enrich the children's vocabulary, we deliver daily story times, rhymes, role-play and group discussions. Children are encouraged to share their own experiences through speaking and acting out events in imaginative play and talking about their own thoughts and ideas.

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## **Literacy**

Early literacy is embedded through all areas of the EYFS and includes reading, writing and comprehension. In readiness for writing, children are encouraged to use mark-making areas indoors and outdoors independently, in addition to participating in teacher led activities. This includes whole class shared reading, as well as phonics sessions which take place daily using our school scheme Essential Letters and Sounds. In Kindergarten, phonics sessions are taught in small groups and focus on segmenting and blending of words and Phase One games in readiness for Phase Two phonics which is taught when the children start Reception. Children in Kindergarten have an introduction to single letter sounds during the Spring and Summer term before they start Reception.

Pre-writing work encourages correct pencil control and orientation. Children have the opportunity to develop their writing skills in accordance with their age, ability and competence. We encourage children to treat books and other resources with respect and they are given many opportunities to listen, join in and respond to stories told by the staff.

## **Mathematics**

We aim for children to achieve mathematical understanding and a firm foundation of number and numerical pattern. Number work is covered through nursery rhymes and simple games. Children are given the opportunity to learn about number, shape, space, position, pattern and measure through their play as well as whole class taught input. We use the play-based White Rose scheme of learning as a foundation for our mathematics.

## **Understanding of the World**

All children are encouraged to solve problems, investigate, make decisions and explore. They learn about living things, their local environment, the world around them and the people who are important in their lives based on personal experiences. Lessons are topic based and often have an historical and geographical foundation.

## **Expressive Art and Design**

Children explore and share their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of art, design, technology, music, drama, movement, dance and imaginative play. Children are given opportunities to paint, draw, create collages, models and play musical instruments. All children have specialist music lessons weekly, where they learn songs and rhymes and enjoy singing together. At various times during the year, children are given the opportunity to participate in short concerts such as the Nativity and an end of year celebratory concert to parents.

## **Outside Classroom**

We have an outside learning space which all children have access to each day. We ask parents to provide suitable all-weather clothing and footwear, so children are protected and there are no barriers to learning including in our Nature Garden. The outside area is an extension of the classrooms and there is a variety of resources to facilitate learning. In this area staff provide

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planned activities for children as well as allowing for them to make their own choices, take risks and explore.

### **Assessment**

Ongoing assessment is an integral part of teaching, learning and development processes. Staff observe children to identify their level of achievement, interests and learning styles. These observations are used to identify developmental gaps, support differentiation, inform children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress. Assessment is completed regularly and involves the key person, kindergarten lead, teacher, teaching assistant, parents and children. This is recorded on our school assessment and tracking platform, Insight, and moderated within the department.

In Kindergarten, staff complete a summary progress check in October and March. This highlights the areas in which a child is progressing well and the areas in which additional support may be needed. This is shared with parents during our twice-yearly Parents Evenings. We complete Transition Records for all children moving to an external school at the end of Kindergarten, in addition to completing their end of year school report.

At the end of the final term in Reception we assess whether each child is emerging or expected in each strand within all of the areas of the EYFS. We submit this data to the Local Authority in June. This is also shared with the child's next teacher who uses this information to make plans and adaptations for the year ahead.

All parents receive an annual written report at the end of the academic year that offers detailed comments on each child's holistic progress across all areas of learning. It celebrates the child's strengths, highlights areas for development, and gives details of the child's general progress to parents.

### **Inclusion/Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

All children and their families are valued for their individuality at Berkhamstead School. They are encouraged to achieve their personal best, and planning is adapted to meet the needs of all groups and abilities. Assessments take into account contributions from a range of perspectives to ensure that any child with potential special educational needs is identified at the earliest possible opportunity. Early identification of special needs is crucial to enable staff to support the development of each child. Concerns are always discussed with parents/carers at an early stage and the School's SENCO is called upon for further information, support and advice. Appropriate steps are taken in accordance with the School's SEN Policy, for example implementing My Plan targets.

### **Parents as Partners**

We recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value the contribution they make. We recognise the vital role that parents play in a child's education and endeavour to work together to form excellent relationships. We do this through:

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- Home visits take place when any child starts in the Early Years. These foster trust and gives parents and staff an opportunity to build relationships with the family before they start at Berkhamstead School;
- The children have the opportunity to spend time at a settle or taster session with their teacher or practitioner before starting Kindergarten or Reception;
- Supporting children through the transition from Kindergarten or Nursery to Reception with the children attending transition afternoon sessions in the summer term prior to starting in September. This is also to support staff and parents in getting to know each other as well as the children;
- Inviting all parents to Kindergarten and Reception induction meetings during the Summer term before their child starts at Berkhamstead School in the Autumn;
- Encouraging parents to talk to the child's teacher/key person if there are any concerns. There is a formal 'parents evening' meeting twice a year at which the teacher/key person and the parent discuss the child's progress in private;
- Parents receive a report on their child's attainment and progress at the end of each school year;
- Arranging a selection of activities throughout the year to encourage collaboration between children and parents, for example, concerts, open classroom sessions, and PTA events;
- Providing parents an opportunity to celebrate their child's learning and development by completing "wow" moments and Tapestry observations which inform planning and provision;
- Operating an open-door policy for parents/carers with any queries or concerns. Conversely, if EYFS staff have concerns about the progress of a child, they will approach parents and carers to discuss them;
- Written contact through reading records and weekly newsletters.

### **Safeguarding and welfare procedures**

It is paramount to us that all children in the school are kept safe. We aim to educate children on boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand why they exist; we provide children with choices to help them develop this important life skill. We support children to self-regulate and manage their emotions appropriately and Personal Social and Emotional Education is at the heart of everything we do.

Children should be allowed to take risks - but need to be taught how to recognise and avoid hazards. We aim to protect the physical and psychological well-being of all children. We know that children learn best when they are healthy and safe, when their individual needs are met and when they have the chance to build positive relationships with the adults around them and their peers.

The rest of our safeguarding and welfare procedures are outlined in the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and related procedures, which are implemented in accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (September 2026) and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.

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## **Health and Safety**

We have a Health and Safety policy which all staff are familiar with. We have designated people responsible for first aid in school. The Early Years Department have staff trained in paediatric first aid. Children are taught the safe and appropriate use of equipment and materials. Children are taught to be mindful when moving around the school and are aware of safety issues. Risk assessments are undertaken before we embark on school outings. A full Health and Safety Policy is available in school.

## **Safer Sleep and Rest**

Although children in Kindergarten and Reception do not routinely sleep during the school day, we recognise that individual children may occasionally need to rest or sleep. Where a child sleeps, staff will follow the safer sleep requirements of the EYFS and take account of the Department for Education's safer sleep guidance. Children will be provided with an appropriate, separate sleep space on a clear, flat and firm surface, suitable for their age and individual needs. Sleeping children will be checked at frequent intervals and staff will remain alert to the child's breathing, position, temperature and general wellbeing. Sleep arrangements will be discussed with parents/carers through a questionnaire as part of our admissions process.

## **Screen Use and Digital Technology**

In accordance with the EYFS statutory framework, we have regard to the Department for Education guidance on screen use. Our approach is precautionary: screen use is limited, purposeful, carefully planned and linked to a clear learning or development aim, for instance it is used as an aid when teaching ELS phonics. Screen-free, practical experiences and high-quality interactions with adults and peers are prioritised. Screens will not be used passively, as background entertainment, simply to occupy children, to manage behaviour or as a routine part of transition times.

Screen use will be for short periods, with an adult co-engaging with children, and will not replace outdoor play, physical activity, stories, conversation, creative play or other first-hand experiences. Screens will not be used during mealtimes or within an hour of a planned sleep period. Content will be checked in advance, age appropriate, advert-free where possible, and selected to avoid fast-paced or over-stimulating material, autoplay and algorithm-driven content. Children will not use AI-enabled tools or toys unless and until their use is supported by appropriate evidence and agreed through the school's safeguarding and digital procedures. Screen-based assistive technology for children with SEND will be considered according to individual need. Personal devices, photography and the sharing of images will be managed in line with the school's safeguarding, data protection and acceptable-use procedures.

## **Dogs and Animals on the Premises**

Berkhampstead School will take reasonable steps to ensure that banned dog breeds are not brought onto the premises. Any other animal brought into contact with Early Years children

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must be suitable, appropriately supervised and subject to a proportionate risk assessment, with consideration given to allergies, hygiene, infection control and children's individual needs.

### **Safer Recruitment, Suitability and Safeguarding Notifications**

The School follows current EYFS and safeguarding requirements for safer recruitment and ongoing suitability. Required enhanced criminal record and barred-list checks will be completed in accordance with statutory requirements, including for volunteers where applicable, and new employees will not begin employment before the required check has been received. Staff are required to disclose information that may affect their suitability to work with children, in line with school procedures. Allegations or concerns that a person has harmed a child, or may pose a risk of harm, will be managed and notified to the relevant authorities and agencies in accordance with the EYFS, Keeping Children Safe in Education and the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

### **Snack and Lunch Times**

We see mealtimes as a social event and a key part of our day. It is a time where the children enjoy a healthy meal, drink or a light snack together. We have a family-style service at Berkhamstead School, where children and staff members eat together, modelling table manners. This is the ideal opportunity to develop and enhance the children's social skills and to encourage interaction and conversation with their peers as they sit together. It also develops independence as the children are encouraged to serve themselves and tidy away their waste. Parents/carers are asked to inform us of any food allergies, intolerances, dietary requirements or foods their child must not eat. This information is recorded and shared appropriately with catering and teaching/support staff. Meals, snacks and drinks provided will be healthy, balanced and nutritious, and the school will have regard to the Department for Education's Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance. Children will be appropriately supervised while eating and drinking; staff will be alert to choking risks, food will be prepared and served in a form appropriate to the child's age and needs, and children will be encouraged to sit safely while eating on size appropriate tables and chairs. Staff responsible for children at mealtimes will know how to respond to choking and allergic reactions in line with first-aid and medical procedures. All staff supervising children when eating have completed up to date food hygiene training.

### **Attendance and Absence**

Regular attendance supports children's learning, wellbeing and safeguarding. The school maintains accurate attendance records and follows up unexplained or prolonged absence in line with its Attendance and Safeguarding policies. Parents/carers are expected to notify the school promptly of absence. Where patterns of absence, unexplained absence or a child's welfare give cause for concern, information will be shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and appropriate action taken.

### **Monitoring and Review**

It is the responsibility of the EYFS staff to follow this policy. The Senior Management Team will carry out monitoring on the EYFS as part of the whole school monitoring system. This policy

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will be reviewed before the start of each academic year and will evolve to incorporate the views of all staff concerned.

## **The Early Learning Goal Descriptors**

### **Communication and Language**

#### **ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding**

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

#### **ELG: Speaking**

- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

#### **ELG: Self-Regulation**

- Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

#### **ELG: Managing Self**

- Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience, and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet, and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

#### **ELG: Building Relationships**

- Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

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## Physical Development

### ELG: Gross Motor Skills

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing; Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping, and climbing.

### ELG: Fine Motor Skills

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paint brushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.

## Literacy

### ELG: Comprehension

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems and during role-play.

### ELG: Word Reading

- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending.
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

### ELG: Writing

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

## Mathematics

### ELG: Number

- Have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number.
- Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5.
- Automatically recall (without reference to rhymes, counting or other aids) number bonds up to 5 (including subtraction facts) and some number bonds to 10, including double facts.

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### **ELG: Numerical Patterns**

- Verbally count beyond 20, recognising the pattern of the counting system.
- Compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity.
- Explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally.

## **Understanding the World**

### **ELG: Past and Present**

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society.
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

### **ELG: People, Culture and Communities**

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps.
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and –when appropriate – maps.

### **ELG: The Natural World**

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants.
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class.
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

## **Expressive Arts and Design**

### **ELG: Creating with Materials**

- Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools, and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.
- Share their creations, explaining the process they have used.
- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.

### **ELG: Being Imaginative and Expressive**

- Invent, adapt, and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher.
- Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs; Perform songs, rhymes, poems, and stories with others, and – when appropriate – try to move in time with music.

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