



BLACKPOOL GATEWAY ACADEMY

EYFS POLICY **2026-2027**

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INTENT

At Blackpool Gateway Academy, our Early Years Foundation Stage is built upon a deep understanding of our children and their unique starting points. We recognise that many of our children join our Nursery and Reception classes with limited language and communication skills and have had fewer opportunities to build a wide bank of personal experiences.

Therefore, our curriculum intent is powerful, focused, and ambitious: to systematically bridge the language and experience gap. We are committed to creating an enchanting, secure, and language-rich world where every child is inspired to explore, to question, and to find their voice.

We follow a Curiosity Approach pedagogy, which is the engine for our curriculum. We believe that by igniting "awe and wonder," we unlock a child's innate drive to learn, communicate, and make sense of the world. Our learning space is planned with authentic resources, natural materials, and beautiful, real-world objects that provoke questioning, critical thinking, and complex play.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Areas of Teaching and Learning in our early years setting follows the curriculum as outlined in the 2021 EYFS statutory framework. The EYFS framework includes 7 areas of learning and development that are equally important and inter-connected sections. The prime areas are seen as particularly important for igniting curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building children's capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The 3 prime areas are:

- Communication and language
 - Listening, attention and understanding
 - Speaking
- Physical development
 - Gross motor skills
 - Fine motor skills
- Personal, social and emotional development
 - Self-regulation
 - Managing self
 - Building relationships

The prime areas are strengthened and applied through 4 specific areas:

- Literacy - Comprehension
 - Word reading
 - Writing
- Mathematics
 - Numbers
 - Numerical patterns
- Understanding the world
 - Past and present
 - People, culture and communities
 - The natural world
- Expressive arts and design
 - Creating with materials
 - Being imaginative and expressive

We recognise that learning is a constant, flowing experience that happens at all times of the day—whether through planned sessions, spontaneous play, or explorations both inside and outside the classroom.

Our school is deeply committed to the Curiosity Approach, a philosophy that transforms our learning spaces into "irresistible environments" filled with wonder and awe. Instead of typical classroom resources, you will find our environments are rich with authentic materials, natural treasures, and intriguing objects designed to spark imagination and provoke inquiry.

Following the Curiosity Approach, our staff act as facilitators and co-explorers. They are trained to seize every opportunity not just for "teaching," but for nurturing a child's natural desire to investigate. Weekly and daily planning ensures a balance of guided and child-led discovery, but our educators are encouraged to think carefully about their questions and interactions to deepen, rather than direct, a child's learning.

This approach ensures learning is truly personalised. By building on a child's own interests and fascinations, we involve them fully in reflecting on their discoveries and how they can build upon their skills. Our ultimate goal is to protect and nurture that innate curiosity, motivating children to become intrinsically driven, life-long learners.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE LEARNER

We view the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL) as the very foundation of a child's learning journey. Our school's commitment to the Curiosity Approach is the practical, living way we bring these characteristics to life, transforming our spaces into environments of awe and wonder.

We believe that *how* a child learns is just as important as *what* they learn. Our practitioners are trained to be "co-explorers," reflecting on each child's unique way of thinking and using our carefully curated environment to nurture these three core characteristics:

- **Playing and Exploring** This is the "spark" of curiosity. For us, this is not about plastic toys; it is about providing a rich, sensory environment full of authentic materials, natural treasures, and intriguing 'loose parts'. Children are intrinsically motivated to investigate, experience, and 'have a go' with genuine wonder.
- **Active Learning** This is the "flow state" of deep engagement. By providing open-ended 'invitations to play' as well as adult-led tasks, children develop powerful concentration. They learn to persevere when they encounter difficulties and discover the profound, intrinsic joy of their own achievements and discoveries, building true self-esteem.
- **Creating and Thinking Critically** This happens when children are given the time, space, and materials to develop their *own* theories. Instead of following instructions for a set outcome, they use their imaginations to make links between ideas. They test their theories, invent new strategies, and become the researchers and architects of their own learning.

EARLY READING, WRITING AND MATHS

We immerse our children in a language-rich environment where high-quality conversation and a language of wonder are modelled by all staff. We believe that developing strong speaking, listening, and language skills is fundamental, as this is the bedrock of comprehension and a rich vocabulary. We place a specific focus on closing the vocabulary gap for any children who may begin school with less experience of such an environment. We use both WellComm and the Neli programme to help us achieve this.

To build confident, successful readers, we follow the highly structured Read Write Inc. phonics scheme. This systematic approach ensures children learn to decode text effectively. We send home fully decodable reading books that precisely match the phonic sounds children have learned in class. This is crucial for building

confidence, as it allows children to use their phonics knowledge as the primary strategy for decoding.

Alongside this, we work tirelessly to foster a deep-seated love of reading. We understand that reading is not just a technical skill but an invitation to explore new worlds. We embed carefully chosen, high-quality, and inspiring books within our learning environments, treating them as treasures that spark curiosity and conversation. We enable our children to take these books home as part of their weekly reading to share this love and passion at home.

Our approach to maths is grounded in the belief that maths is everywhere. We see our entire school, indoors and out, as a rich mathematical learning environment. We use the research and resources developed by the NCETM to ensure that all children develop firm mathematical foundations in a way that is engaging, and appropriate for their age.

Children discover mathematical concepts through tangible, real-world, and play-based experiences. They explore patterns, sorting, counting, and measurement using natural and authentic 'loose parts' and intriguing objects as well as focus daily maths focussed activities and teaching. Rather than focusing on a list of separate objectives, the resources are structured around six key conceptual areas: Cardinality and Counting, Comparison, Composition, Pattern, Shape and Space, and Measures. This approach, based on international research, ensures children develop firm foundations by exploring broad concepts through a wide range of play-based activities and experiences.

PLANNING

Our planning process in Reception is guided by the EYFS statutory framework, which we use in conjunction with ongoing data analysis and assessments. This allows us to plan a series of topics based on pupil interests, ensuring that experiences in all seven areas of learning are provided. This long-term vision informs our short-term weekly planning. These weekly plans are developed alongside daily observations and are kept flexible to accommodate unplanned circumstances or to respond to the children's immediate needs and responses. We plan a purposeful mix of adult-focused and independent activities every week. Children have the opportunity to work and learn in all areas of the provision, both in the classroom and outdoors. We use a variety of teaching methods—including whole class, group, and individual activities—to develop skills across the entire curriculum as appropriate. We use targeted questions and high-quality interactions to extend learning. As reflective practitioners, we continually consider the different ways that children learn and ensure this understanding is reflected in our planning and daily practice.

ASSESSMENT

We believe that ongoing assessment is an integral part of the learning and development process, allowing us to support every child effectively. Our staff continuously observe pupils as they play and learn. These observations help us identify their individual achievements, current interests and preferred learning styles. This valuable insight is then used to shape and adapt our future planning, making it responsive to the children's needs. We also highly value and incorporate observations shared by parents and carers as part of this holistic approach. Throughout the year, we use a range of specific assessments to support individual development as needed. These include half termly formal phonics assessments as well as weekly informal assessments in order to inform interventions. We complete both WellComm and Neli assessments to inform staff of the language and communication needs of each child.

At the end of the year, we complete the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile for each child. This profile is not a test; it is a comprehensive summary of our ongoing observations and discussions throughout the year. For this profile, pupils are assessed against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELGs), and a judgement is made as to whether they are:

- Meeting expected levels of development
- Not yet reaching expected levels (described as 'emerging')

The results of the EYFS Profile are shared with all parents and carers in a detailed, written summary report in July. We also formally report on your child's progress at parent-teacher consultations twice more during the year (in October and March).

As a statutory requirement, the EYFS Profile data is also submitted to the Local Authority (LA) in the summer term.

SAFETY

At Gateway, We know that true curiosity and deep learning can only happen when a child feels healthy, safe, and emotionally secure. As a Nurture school we know developing a sense of well-being is the foundation for everything we do; a child's welfare is paramount. We have created an enabling environment that is not only physically safe but also emotionally nurturing and welcoming. This secure base gives children the confidence to be themselves, explore with their whole bodies, and grow into capable, self-assured learners. A core part of our philosophy is teaching children resilience and self-awareness. Following the Curiosity Approach, we provide real, managed-risk opportunities.

They learn to make thoughtful choices, understand consequences, and handle authentic materials and tools with respect. This is all underpinned by our stringent safeguarding policies and EYFS Risk Assessment robust daily procedures, which create a secure framework within which children can safely challenge themselves.

INCLUSION

At Gateway, we value all children as unique individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, religion, home language, background, ability, or gender.

We plan a curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs of the individual child. We support them to progress at their own pace, with the goal that most of our children will meet the expected levels of development against the Early Learning Goals. We strongly believe that early identification of children with additional needs is crucial. This enables us to provide the child with the specific support they need as early as possible. In doing so, we work closely with parents and outside agencies.

At times, it may be necessary to work with children in a small group or on an individual basis to allow for specialist input (for example, Speech and Language support). However, whenever possible, this support is provided within the classroom context to ensure every child feels fully included.

We are committed to providing a high-quality, inclusive learning environment for all children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), viewing their home languages and cultural backgrounds as a significant strength. Our approach is to immerse children in a total communication environment, where language is not just spoken but also seen and experienced. Staff skilfully model English and use a multi-sensory approach, incorporating gesture, facial expression, real-world objects, and visual aids (like 'in-the-moment' pictures and Makaton) to build comprehension. While fostering the acquisition of English, we actively value and integrate a child's home language into the setting through strong parent partnerships. This "home-to-school" bridge ensures EAL learners feel secure, valued, and confident, providing them with a secure base from which to explore, play, and develop their new language across all areas of provision.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS, CARERS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

We believe that a strong, positive partnership between home, school, and the wider community is essential for our children's success. As EYFS staff, we firmly believe that by establishing a strong, collaborative parent-school relationship from the very beginning, we effectively align children with our school's expectations while simultaneously empowering parents to become confident partners in supporting their

child's learning. Throughout the year, we maintain an open, continuous dialogue using ClassDojo, where we not only celebrate children's achievements but also post videos and resource links to empower parents to support home learning and homework. We further strengthen these bonds by inviting parents into school for practical sessions, such as 'Squiggle While You Wiggle' workshops to share our learning strategies, and for themed craft events that bring our whole community together.

Engaging with our wider community is a key part of our curriculum, helping children understand the world they live in. We actively build these relationships by inviting community helpers, such as local nurses and PCSOs, to visit the setting. We also extend learning beyond our gates, taking children on local walks and visiting community hubs like the supermarket, to build their first-hand experiences and sense of belonging.

TRANSITION

Our comprehensive transition process begins even before a child starts in our Reception class, with supportive home visits that help us build relationships in a familiar environment. We have nursery visits and 'stay and play' sessions where our new children can meet the adults and explore the setting, ensuring they feel secure and confident. We arrange a new starter session for our parents where they meet the PWO, Family Engagement Officer and it is attended by the School Readiness Team. We continue to publicise and encourage our new starters to attend the events put on by the School Readiness Team throughout the summer as well sharing a range of their supportive information e.g. toileting, listening and attention advice.

At the end of our children's EYFS journey we ensure a seamless transition into Year 1 by facilitating early connections; children regularly interact with Year 1 staff during cross-phase activities, such as phonics groupings, building familiarity long before they move. To maintain pedagogical continuity, our EYFS team has collaborated extensively with Year 1 colleagues to share the ethos of the Curiosity Approach. This partnership ensures our child-led, inquiry-based learning style is thoughtfully extended, supporting the ongoing development of independent learning and high-quality outdoor play as children enter Key Stage 1.