Continuous Provision at Thursfield

PURPOSE

To create intentional, language-rich and inclusive environments where children revisit learning, follow their interests, practise and apply skills, solve problems, make connections and become increasingly independent learners.

OUR SHARED RATIONALE

Continuous provision is the carefully planned environment, resources and routines that remain available for children to use independently over time. It is not simply a set of activities to keep children occupied. Each area should have a clear purpose, accessible resources and opportunities for children to practise, deepen and apply what they have been taught. Across all our EYFS classrooms, high-quality provision connects with the intended curriculum while remaining responsive to children's interests, prior experiences and next steps. Children need time to repeat experiences, make choices, collaborate with others, encounter manageable challenge and revisit ideas over time in order to deepen understanding and strengthen memory.

WHAT RESEARCH AND GUIDANCE TELL US

The Department for Education's Development Matters guidance describes effective early education as a mix of child-led play, adult modelling, observation, guided learning and direct teaching. It emphasises enabling environments, responsive interactions, repetition, language development and the characteristics of effective learning: playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically.

The Department for Education's early years research reviews highlight the importance of high-quality adult interaction, vocabulary, reading aloud, play and carefully planned curriculum experiences. The Education Endowment Foundation's Early Years Toolkit describes play-based learning as promising, while noting that outcomes depend on implementation and that the evidence base for play-based learning overall is limited. This supports purposeful provision with skilled adult interaction, rather than assuming that simply providing toys will lead to learning.

We use these sources as guidance, alongside the statutory EYFS framework, our school's curriculum and professional judgement.

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PROVISION

Intentional, not over-directed: plan what children might learn, but allow children to shape the play and make meaningful choices.

Language at the centre: adults model precise vocabulary, extend children's sentences and make space for children to explain their thinking.

Teach, then practise: connect provision to stories, phonics, maths, knowledge and skills introduced during adult-led teaching.

Open-ended and purposeful: offer resources that can be used in different ways, with a few carefully chosen additions to deepen learning.

Inclusive by design: ensure resources, layouts, visuals and adult support enable all children to participate, including children with SEND, EAL or disadvantaged children.

Observe and respond: notice what children know, can do and are trying to work out; adapt resources and interactions to further deepen knowledge and skills.

Protect sustained play: avoid unnecessary interruptions and allow projects, stories and constructions to continue over time where practical.

EYFS CORE VOCABULARY SPINE FOR CONTINUOUS PROVISION

Our EYFS Core Vocabulary Spine allows children to repeatedly encounter and apply key vocabulary across all areas of provision, enabling language and understanding to deepen progressively from ages 2–5.

SUGGESTED PROGRESSION

2-3 years: Single words and simple phrases "Pour water." "Build tower." "Big scoop."

3-4 years: Use vocabulary in short sentences "I can balance the blocks." "The boat will float."

4-5 years: Explain thinking using vocabulary "I predicted it would sink because it is heavy." "I designed a strong bridge by joining the blocks together."

See **Vocabulary Progression Map** for progressive vocabulary development across continuous provision from ages 2–5.

THE PRACTITIONER'S ROLE IN EVERY AREA

Prepare: make the purpose clear, resources accessible and the space inviting, safe and manageable.

Notice: observe before stepping in. What is the child interested in? What do they already know? What is difficult?

Join sensitively: enter play with a genuine reason, follow the child's lead and avoid taking over or turning every interaction into questioning. Follow the ShREC model during interactions.

Model and extend: demonstrate a skill or introduce vocabulary when it helps; narrate thinking and offer a small, well-timed challenge.

Connect to curriculum: Revisit recent teaching and help children apply knowledge, vocabulary and skills in meaningful contexts through play and exploration.

Reflect: consider who uses the area, who does not, what learning is emerging and what small change would improve access or challenge.

Continuous Provision at Thursfield

INCLUSION, CHALLENGE AND ADAPTATION

The same area should be accessible to children with different starting points. Adapt the environment and adult support while keeping expectations ambitious.

Communication and language: use visuals, objects, gestures, repetition, simple language and additional processing time; model rather than demand a verbal response.

EAL: value home languages and prior knowledge; use real objects, photographs, demonstrations, peer modelling and repeated key vocabulary while explicitly connecting new vocabulary to existing language and experiences.

SEND and sensory needs: consider noise, crowding, lighting, seating, tool size, tactile preferences and predictable routines. Offer alternative ways to participate.

Fine-motor development: provide a range of tool sizes, vertical surfaces, larger materials and opportunities to use both hands; avoid making pencil grip the only route to participation.

Children needing additional challenge: introduce a problem to solve, a more precise word, a plan to follow, a reason to compare or a chance to explain and review their strategy.

Equity of access: notice which children regularly choose each area and which children rarely enter. Avoid assuming lack of interest before considering accessibility, confidence, representation and adult invitation

REVIEW AND EVALUATE EACH AREA

Use these questions during regular provision reviews. A small change based on observation is often more useful than replacing all the resources.

Is the purpose of this area clear to adults and children, and does it contribute to our curriculum concepts, vocabulary and skills progression?

Can children access, select and return resources independently?

Are the resources open-ended, safe, inclusive and in good condition?

What language and knowledge are children likely to encounter here?

How will children revisit recent teaching or build on previous experiences?

Which children use the area, who does not, and what might be getting in the way?

Are adults interacting purposefully without interrupting sustained play?

What have we noticed children doing or saying, and what should we maintain, remove or add next?

HOW TO USE THIS CONTINUOUS PROVISION HANDBOOK

This handbook supports practitioners in understanding how each area of continuous provision contributes to children's learning and development.

Each provision area is designed to help children revisit and apply curriculum knowledge, vocabulary and skills through play, exploration and high-quality interactions. The environment remains consistent, while adult support and challenge develop as children progress. This allows children to revisit experiences, embed learning and make connections over time while ensuring progression from ages 2–5.

For each provision area you will find:

Curriculum concept links

Core vocabulary

Skills developed

Assessment opportunities

Age-related progression guidance

Adult interactions and prompts

Possible resources and enhancements

Together with the Knowledge Progression Framework, Vocabulary Progression Framework and Skills Progression Framework, this handbook supports consistent curriculum implementation across the Early Years

PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

When supporting learning in provision, consider:

What do children need to know? (**Knowledge**)

What do children need to say? (**Vocabulary**)

What do children need to do? (**Skills**)

How can I support or extend learning? (**Adult interaction)**

What evidence of learning can I observe? (**Assessment**)

What previous learning can I help children connect this to?

Continuous provision is a key vehicle for curriculum implementation, enabling children to revisit, practise and deepen learning independently and alongside others.

Communication & Language

AREA OVERVIEW

Communication and language underpin all areas of learning. A dedicated communication-rich area supports children to listen attentively, develop vocabulary, engage in conversations and express their ideas with increasing confidence. Through stories, puppets, storytelling resources and meaningful discussion, children learn to communicate effectively, understand others and make sense of the world around them.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

All curriculum concepts

CORE VOCABULARY

Listen - Talk - Explain - Question - Answer - Describe

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Questioning - Explaining - Collaboration

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Language helps us communicate - Questions help us learn - Vocabulary improves understanding.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Join discussions - Ask questions - Explain ideas - Use curriculum vocabulary - Build on their learning

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Listen to simple stories and songs. Use single words and short phrases. Join in with familiar rhymes. Begin taking turns in simple conversations.	Use clear, simple language. Repeat and expand children's utterances. Engage in sustained back-and-forth interactions.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Use longer sentences. Retell simple events and stories. Ask and answer questions. Engage in conversations with peers.	Introduce new vocabulary. Extend conversations. Encourage storytelling and imaginative language.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Use increasingly complex sentences. Explain ideas and experiences. Listen attentively in a range of situations. Engage in sustained discussions. Use new vocabulary confidently.	Model ambitious vocabulary. Encourage reasoning and explanation. Support collaborative discussion and storytelling.

Useful language and prompts

"Can you tell me more about that?"
"What happened next?"
"How do you know?"
"What makes you think that?"
"Can you explain your idea to your friend?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Story sacks; puppets; small world storytelling resources; familiar books; picture cards; sequencing cards; telephones; microphones; visual prompts; mirrors; discussion cards; audio recordings and talking tins where available.

Reading

AREA OVERVIEW

A welcoming reading area supports children to enjoy books, develop knowledge of stories and information, revisit familiar texts, build vocabulary and see themselves and others represented. Reading is not only decoding: in Reception, children need rich experiences of language, narrative, rhyme, information books and conversations about meaning. The area should support independent browsing as well as adult-shared reading.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Celebrations - Families - Community - Animals - Insects

CORE VOCABULARY

Book - Story - Character - Author - Predict - Retell

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Remembering & Recalling - Explaining - Prediction

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Stories have characters and settings - Books contain information - Stories often connect to curriculum concepts.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Retell stories - Discuss characters - Recall information - Make predictions - Apply vocabulary independently.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Handle books independently. Enjoy familiar stories and rhymes. Point to pictures and name objects.	Share books daily. Model enjoyment of reading.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Retell favourite stories. Anticipate repeated phrases. Discuss characters and events.	Develop comprehension through conversation. Introduce ambitious vocabulary.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Talk confidently about books. Make predictions and connections. Apply early reading knowledge.	Promote discussion and reflection. Encourage children to justify ideas.

Useful language and prompts

"Which part would you like to look at or hear again?"
"What do you notice in this picture?"
"What does that word mean here?"
"How do you think the character feels? What in the story helps you know?"
"Does this remind you of anything you have seen or done?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

A manageable, regularly refreshed selection of high-quality fiction, non-fiction, poetry and rhyme; familiar class texts; books reflecting diverse families, cultures, abilities and experiences; front-facing displays; cushions or defined seating; puppets or story props; story maps and related objects where useful.

Mark Making & Writing

AREA OVERVIEW

Mark making is an important route into communication, representation and early writing. Children need frequent opportunities to make marks for their own purposes, experiment with tools and surfaces, and see that marks can carry meaning. The area supports fine-motor control, visual-motor coordination, composition, oral language and early understanding of writing. Meaningful reasons to write matter more than producing a large quantity of worksheets.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Celebrations - Families - Community - Ourselves

CORE VOCABULARY

Draw - Line - Shape - Letter - Word - Message

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Remembering & Recalling - Explaining - Independence

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Marks carry meaning - Writing is used to communicate - Letters and words represent language.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Give meaning to marks - Write for a purpose - Use vocabulary from learning - Explain their writing - Communicate ideas independently

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Make marks for pleasure. Develop shoulder, arm and hand control. Explore different tools.	Celebrate all marks. Provide varied opportunities for mark making.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Give meaning to marks. Begin drawing recognisable forms. Show interest in symbols and print.	Model mark making with purpose. Encourage storytelling through marks.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Use writing in meaningful contexts. Begin recording ideas independently. Apply taught phonics knowledge.	Provide authentic reasons to write. Encourage independence and resilience.

Useful language and prompts

"Tell me about the marks you have made."
"What do you want your message to say?"
"Who might need to read this?"
"What could we write so people know where to go?"
"Which sound can you hear at the start of that word?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

A range of paper sizes and textures; clipboards; notebooks; envelopes; labels; cards; chalk and whiteboards; pencils, crayons, pens and suitable chunky tools; vertical and horizontal surfaces; name cards and relevant environmental print; purposeful forms such as maps, lists, signs, menus, tickets and message pads.

Fine Motor

AREA OVERVIEW

A well-planned fine motor area supports children to develop the strength, control, coordination and dexterity needed for everyday tasks and future writing. Through a range of playful, hands-on experiences, children strengthen the small muscles in their hands and fingers while developing concentration, perseverance and independence. The area should provide meaningful opportunities for children to pinch, squeeze, twist, thread, manipulate and create using a variety of tools and materials.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Families - Community - Ourselves

CORE VOCABULARY

Pinch - Thread - Twist - Grip - Control - Strengthen

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Independence - Control and Coordination

- Problem Solving - Perseverance - Communication

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Hands and fingers can become stronger through practice - Different tools require different movements and levels of control - Fine motor skills help us complete everyday tasks

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Use tools with increasing control - Show hand strength and coordination - Persevere with challenging task - Select resources independently - Use vocabulary such as grip, control and strengthen.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Explore tools and resources using their hands and fingers. Develop hand strength through squeezing, pinching and pulling. Enjoy repetitive actions that build coordination.	Provide daily opportunities to strengthen hands and fingers. Model simple actions and vocabulary. Encourage independence and perseverance.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Use a wider range of tools with increasing control. Develop hand-eye coordination. Use tools with a clear purpose. Sustain attention.	Introduce increasingly challenging resources. Support problem-solving and independence.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Show precision and control in hand movements. Apply fine motor skills to drawing and writing. Persevere with challenging tasks.	Provide opportunities to refine and practise skills. Introduce challenges requiring accuracy and control. Support the transition to writing fluency.

Useful language and prompts

"Can you use your fingers to pick that up?"
"What happens if you squeeze a little more gently?"
"How could you make that stay together?"
"Can you find another way to move those objects?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Tweezers and tongs; threading beads and laces; peg boards; construction kits; nuts and bolts; small-world resources; jigsaws; scissors; hole punches; pipettes; stickers; weaving materials; locks and keys; fastening frames with buttons, zips and buckles; clipboard activities; finger gym resources; loose parts for sorting and transferring.

Mathematics

AREA OVERVIEW

A well-resourced maths area supports children to develop a deep understanding of number, pattern, shape, space and measure through practical exploration and play. Children learn mathematical concepts best when they can see, touch, move and talk about them in meaningful contexts. The area should encourage curiosity, problem-solving, reasoning and mathematical language through both child-initiated and adult-supported experiences.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Seasons - Weather - Plants - Trees - Animals

CORE VOCABULARY

Count - More - Fewer - Compare - Pattern - Measure

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Comparing - Problem Solving - Reasoning - Remembering & Recalling

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Numbers represent quantities - Objects can be compared and measured - Patterns occur in the world around us.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Count accurately - Compare quantities - Explain mathematical thinking - Use mathematical vocabulary - Apply mathematical knowledge independently.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Notice patterns and quantities. Explore filling, emptying and matching. Use early mathematical language.	Model counting and comparison language. Embed maths through play.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Count objects accurately. Compare quantities. Explore shape and pattern.	Ask reasoning questions. Encourage noticing mathematical relationships.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Apply mathematical understanding independently. Use number knowledge in play. Explain mathematical thinking.	Promote reasoning and problem-solving. Encourage multiple methods.

Useful language and prompts

"How many do you have altogether?"
"What do you notice about these objects?"
"Can you find another way to sort them?"
"Which is bigger, smaller, longer or shorter?"
"How do you know?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Counting objects and loose parts; number lines and numeral cards; tens frames; dice and dominoes; sorting trays; measuring tools; balance scales; shape collections; pattern blocks; peg boards; natural materials; tape measures; calendars; clocks; puzzles and mathematical games.

Creative

AREA OVERVIEW

A creative area provides opportunities for children to express ideas, communicate feelings, develop imagination and explore a wide range of media and materials. Creative experiences support fine motor development, language, problem-solving and independent thinking. The focus should be on exploration, choice and the creative process rather than producing identical outcomes.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Seasons - Celebrations - Ourselves - Families

CORE VOCABULARY

Create - Mix - Shape - Pattern - Design - Improve

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Explaining - Creativity - Independence - Problem Solving

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Colours can be mixed - Different materials create different effects - Art can represent experiences and ideas.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Explain their creations - Select appropriate resources - Use curriculum vocabulary - Reflect on their work - Make improvements.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES		
	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Explore materials using their senses. Experiment with colour and texture. Enjoy the process rather than outcomes.	Provide varied materials. Value exploration and experimentation.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Make choices about materials. Begin representing ideas. Talk about creations.	Introduce artistic vocabulary. Encourage discussion about choices.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Create with a clear purpose. Select resources independently. Evaluate and refine their work.	Encourage planning and reflection. Support children to explain their creative process.
Useful language and prompts "Tell me about what you are creating." "What could you use to make that?" "I wonder what would happen if..." "How did you decide to do it that way?" "What might you add or change next?"		

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Paints, brushes, pencils, crayons, chalks and markers; collage materials; recyclable materials; glue, tape and joining materials; modelling dough and clay; natural materials; scissors; stamps and printing resources; easels; drawing paper in various sizes; fabric, ribbon and textiles.

Small World

AREA OVERVIEW

Small world play allows children to create and revisit miniature worlds, develop narratives and represent experiences, ideas and imagined situations. It supports communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, understanding the world and expressive arts and design. Children can explore sequence, cause and effect, relationships, place, belonging and different perspectives through figures, animals, vehicles and settings.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Celebrations - Families - Community - Animals - Insects

CORE VOCABULARY

Character - Story - Journey - Explore - Pretend - Adventure

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Remembering & Recalling - Comparing - Explaining - Imagination

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Families can be different - People have different roles within a community - Animals live in different habitats - Celebrations are important to different people.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Retell experiences - Recreate prior learning through play - Use curriculum vocabulary in context - Explain what is happening in their play - Make links to stories and experiences.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Explore and manipulate figures and resources. Recreate familiar experiences. Develop simple narratives.	Model simple language and storytelling. Encourage naming and describing.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Create simple storylines. Use resources symbolically. Connect play to experiences and stories.	Introduce story vocabulary. Encourage collaborative play.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Create detailed narratives. Incorporate characters, problems and solutions. Retell and innovate stories.	Encourage reasoning and explanation. Extend play through questioning.

Useful language and prompts

"Tell me about the place you have made."
"What might happen next?"
"How could the character be feeling? What makes you think that?"
"How is this place like or different from our local area?"
"What could you use to make a shelter/bridge/road?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Figures and animals; people and family figures representing different identities; vehicles; blocks and loose parts; natural materials; fabric; roads, maps and simple backdrops; objects linked to current stories or children's interests; non-fiction books and photographs for reference.

Construction

AREA OVERVIEW

Construction provides practical opportunities to design, build, test and improve. Children explore shape, space, balance, size, pattern, quantity, spatial reasoning and early engineering. They practise fine-motor control, perseverance, collaboration and explaining their thinking. Construction can connect mathematics and understanding the world with communication, physical development and expressive arts and design.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Community - Families - Weather - Seasons - Animals

CORE VOCABULARY

Build - Join - Stack - Balance - Strong - Design

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Problem Solving - Comparing - Collaboration - Independence

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Homes and buildings have different purposes - Communities contain different types of buildings - Animals need habitats and shelter - Weather can affect structures and environments.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Plan before building - Solve problems when structures collapse - Explain what they have built - Use vocabulary such as build, strong and balance - Work collaboratively with others.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Stack, connect and manipulate resources. Explore size and shape. Enjoy repetitive building experiences.	Introduce language describing position, size and shape. Encourage exploration.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Build with intention. Create recognisable structures. Begin solving practical problems.	Encourage planning and reviewing. Introduce mathematical vocabulary.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Design and construct complex models. Adapt plans when encountering challenges. Collaborate effectively.	Promote evaluation and problem-solving. Encourage children to explain designs.

Useful language and prompts

"What are you trying to make?"
"How could we make the base stronger?"
"What do you notice when you add another block?"
"How could you check which tower is taller?"
"What could you change if you wanted a vehicle to pass underneath?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

A range of blocks and construction sets; large-scale boxes and tubes; planks and safe loose parts; people, animals and vehicles; photos of buildings, bridges and structures; simple plans or picture prompts; clipboards, paper, pencils and measuring tools where useful.

Role Play

AREA OVERVIEW

Role play enables children to explore real and imagined roles, practise language and social conventions, make sense of experiences and consider viewpoints beyond their own. It can build confidence, cooperation, self-regulation and vocabulary. A well-planned role-play area gives children a meaningful reason to communicate, write, count, solve problems and use knowledge from stories and the wider world.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Families - Community - Celebrations - Ourselves

CORE VOCABULARY

Imagine - Create - Explain - Choose - Help - Community

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Communication - Collaboration - Problem Solving - Independence - Explaining

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
People have different responsibilities - Communities contain different occupations - Families have different structures - Celebrations involve different traditions.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Sustain and develop a role - Use topic vocabulary during play - Negotiate with others - Explain what is happening in their play - Apply experiences from home, stories and curriculum learning..

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES		
	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Use familiar objects in pretend play. Copy actions observed at home and in everyday life. Begin pretending objects represent something else. Play alongside others.	Model simple pretend scenarios. Introduce vocabulary linked to experiences. Join play sensitively to extend language.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Create simple storylines. Take on familiar roles. Use props purposefully. Play cooperatively with others.	Introduce new vocabulary. Extend children's ideas through conversation. Add real-life resources and experiences.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Develop complex narratives. Negotiate and sustain roles. Use language to organise play. Incorporate knowledge from stories and topics.	Encourage planning and reflection. Introduce challenges and problems to solve. Support sustained shared thinking.
Useful language and prompts "What does your customer need?" "How will you decide whose turn it is?" "What information do we need to write down?" "What could we do if we run out of ingredients?" "How might this situation feel for the other person?"		

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

A flexible core home or familiar-life area with open-ended props; fabric and loose parts; role badges or simple costume items; real, safe everyday objects; notepads, signs, menus, lists, appointment cards, tickets and number resources; additions linked to children's interests and curriculum themes.

Sand Play

AREA OVERVIEW

Sand play provides rich opportunities for exploration, investigation and imaginative play. Children use all their senses as they scoop, pour, sift, dig, build and create. Sand supports communication and language, mathematics, physical development and understanding the world, while offering opportunities for collaboration, creativity and sustained concentration. Children often revisit familiar actions repeatedly, refining skills and developing increasingly complex ideas.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Weather - Seasons - Plants - Insects

CORE VOCABULARY

Pour - Fill - Empty - Scoop - Measure - Texture

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Observing - Comparing - Investigating - Problem Solving

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Materials have different properties - Habitats are made from natural materials - Weather affects materials and environments.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Compare materials - Investigate independently - Use mathematical language - Explain what they notice - Explore capacity and quantity.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES		
	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Explore sand through sensory experiences. Fill, empty, scoop and pour repeatedly. Use simple tools with increasing control. Play alongside others.	Model simple language. Introduce basic concepts such as full/empty and in/out. Encourage exploration without expectation of outcomes.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Compare quantities and capacities. Build simple structures and pathways. Develop imaginative play scenarios. Work alongside and with peers.	ntroduce mathematical vocabulary. Encourage prediction and problem-solving. Extend narratives through discussion and questioning.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Plan and create increasingly complex structures. Estimate and compare quantities. Test ideas and solve problems independently. Sustain collaborative projects.	Encourage reasoning and explanation. Introduce challenges requiring planning and evaluation. Support investigation and enquiry.
Useful language and prompts "What do you notice about the sand today?" "Which container holds more?" "What happens when we add water?" "How could we make the tunnel stronger?" "Tell me about what you are building."		

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Dry and damp sand; buckets; spades; scoops; funnels; sieves; measuring containers; guttering and tubes; natural materials; shells and stones; small world figures; clipboards and pencils; number and vocabulary prompts where appropriate.

Water Play

AREA OVERVIEW

Water play encourages curiosity, investigation and problem-solving. It allows children to explore scientific concepts through direct experience while supporting language development, mathematical thinking, social interaction and physical coordination. The open-ended nature of water play encourages children to observe, predict, test and refine their understanding.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Weather - Seasons - Plants - Animals

CORE VOCABULARY

Pour - Sink - Float - Full - Empty - Flow

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Observing - Investigating - Questioning - Explaining - Problem Solving

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Water changes shape - Objects behave differently in water - Plants need water to grow - Weather affects water.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Make predictions - Test ideas - Explain observations - Use investigation vocabulary - Revisit previous learning.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Enjoy filling and emptying containers. Observe movement and splashing. Explore cause and effect. Use simple vocabulary such as wet, empty and full.	Narrate children's actions. Model language. Encourage noticing changes.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Compare container sizes. Explore floating and sinking. Begin making simple predictions. Solve simple practical problems.	Ask open questions. Introduce comparative language. Encourage children to test ideas.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Investigate scientific concepts independently. Explain and justify predictions. Measure and compare accurately. Work collaboratively to solve challenges.	Promote reasoning and reflection. Introduce investigations and enquiry-based learning. Encourage evaluation of outcomes.

Useful language and prompts

"What do you think will happen?"
"How can we find out?"
"Why do you think that floated?"
"Which container holds the most water?"
"How could we get the water from here to there?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Water trays; jugs; cups; funnels; tubing; guttering; boats; containers of different sizes; floating and sinking objects; pipettes; sponges; measuring cylinders; natural materials; waterproof clipboards and pencils.

Play Dough

AREA OVERVIEW

Play dough is a versatile, tactile material for exploration, creativity and fine-motor development. Squeezing, rolling, pinching, flattening and cutting build hand strength and coordination that contribute to later tool use and writing. Children also explore shape, volume, texture, change and representation while using language to describe processes and creations.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Animals - Insects - Plants - Ourselves

CORE VOCABULARY

Squash - Roll - Stretch - Flatten - Shape - Create

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Problem Solving - Independence - Observing - Creativity

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Materials can be changed and manipulated - Shapes and models can represent real objects.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Create purposefully - Explain what they have made - Refine ideas - Use tools effectively - Represent prior learning.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Squeeze, pat and roll dough. Strengthen hand and finger muscles. Use simple tools.	Model actions and vocabulary. Encourage sensory exploration.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Create simple representations. Combine tools and materials. Talk about creations.	Extend vocabulary. Encourage purposeful manipulation.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Create detailed models. Plan and adapt designs. Use fine motor skills with increasing precision.	Encourage evaluation and refinement. Link to wider learning.

Useful language and prompts

"What happens when you press harder or more gently?"
"How could you make that longer/thinner/smoother?"
"What could you use to join those pieces?"
"How many pieces do you need?"
"Tell me how you made that shape."

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Fresh, accessible dough; boards; rolling pins; cutters; blunt modelling tools; loose parts such as craft sticks, shells or buttons where safe and appropriate; natural materials; picture prompts; mats or trays; optional dough linked to stories, seasonal changes or current learning.

Outdoor

AREA OVERVIEW

Outdoor provision offers unique opportunities for movement, exploration, investigation and large-scale play that cannot always be replicated indoors. High-quality outdoor learning supports all areas of the EYFS and enables children to take appropriate risks, develop resilience, investigate the natural world and apply learning in meaningful contexts. The outdoor environment should be viewed as an extension of the classroom rather than a break from learning.

CURRICULUM CONCEPT LINKS

Seasons - Weather - Plants - Trees - Animals - Insects - Community

CORE VOCABULARY

Explore - Climb - Balance - Move - Challenge - Adventure

SKILLS DEVELOPED

Observing - Investigating - Comparing - Collaboration - Independence - Resilience

KNOWLEDGE TO REVISIT

Children may learn and apply:
Seasonal changes occur over time - Living things change and grow - Communities contain different people and places -Weather affects the environment.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Notice when children:
Observe closely - Investigate independently - Apply prior learning outdoors - Use curriculum vocabulary naturally - Explain what they have discovered.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE AGE RANGES

	Children are likely to	Adults might
2-3 Years Caterpillars	Explore large-scale movement. Develop balance and coordination. Investigate natural materials. Enjoy transporting and moving objects.	Provide safe opportunities for exploration. Model language linked to actions and discoveries. Encourage independence.
3-4 Years Butterflies	Take on physical challenges confidently. Explore simple risk-taking. Develop imaginative outdoor play. Begin working collaboratively.	Encourage problem-solving. Support cooperative play. Introduce simple challenges.
4-5 Years Reception Little Explorers	Manage risks appropriately. Plan and carry out large-scale projects. Apply skills and knowledge across areas of learning. Show resilience when faced with challenges.	Facilitate enquiry-based learning. Encourage reflection and evaluation. Support sustained collaborative projects.

Useful language and prompts

"What do you notice?"
"How could we make this safer or stronger?"
"What has changed since last time?"
"What do you think caused that?"
"How could we work together to solve this problem?"

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Open-ended loose parts; blocks and crates; planks; tyres; climbing equipment; natural materials; planting resources; mark-making materials; den-building materials; wheeled toys; construction resources; water and sand opportunities; observational equipment such as magnifiers and binoculars.