



Our Pre-School Curriculum

3–5 Years

Play Days Nursery & Academy



*Pre-school is not about getting children ready for school.
It is about giving them the confidence, curiosity, resilience & kindness
to flourish — in school, in friendships & in life.*

Mel & the entire Play Days Pre-School Team

Helping Hands • Happy Hearts • Healthy Minds



EYFS 2026

Our Pre-School Provision

Our pre-school provision is built upon the same warm, child-centered foundation that has shaped every stage of your child's Play Days journey. Now, with added depth & intentionality, we prepare children for a confident, settled transition into school.

We know our children as individuals. We know what makes them curious, what challenges them, what they find funny & what they find hard. Our curriculum is not delivered to children — it is built around them.



Our Theoretical Foundations

Our pre-school practice is built on the same foundations as our baby & toddler rooms — deepened & expanded as children's thinking grows.

Emotion Coaching — John Gottman

We connect first, always, before we address behaviour. By pre-school, children are moving from being co-regulated by an adult towards regulating themselves — naming their own feelings, choosing a strategy, recovering & returning to play.

The Key Person Approach — Bowlby & Ainsworth

Secure attachment remains the foundation of everything. Every child has a Key Person who knows them deeply, & a Buddy Key Person so that someone special is always there. Our Professional Love Policy details how we begin to transition our children towards school expectations

Jean Piaget — Learning by Doing

Children build understanding by acting on the world — sorting, testing, pouring, constructing, getting it wrong & trying again. Real objects & real problems, not worksheets.

Lev Vygotsky — Learning Through Talk & Scaffolding

This is the foundation that comes into its own at 3–5. Children achieve more with a skilled adult alongside them than they ever could alone. Our practitioners work in that gap deliberately — modelling, questioning, narrating, offering the next word or the next step, then stepping back. Talk is the tool that carries the learning.

Reggio Emilia — The Environment as the Third Teacher

Our Atelier, our natural materials & our open-ended provision are planned as teaching in their own right. Children's work is displayed with their own words beside it, because their thinking deserves to be taken seriously.

Pie Corbett — Talk for Writing

Children learn a story by heart through telling, actions & story maps; then innovate on it; then invent their own. Story language goes in through the ear long before it comes out on paper.

Vivian Gussin Paley — Helicopter Stories

Children dictate their own stories & then act them out with their friends. The child's words are never corrected or improved — they are honoured exactly as they are told.

Bloom's Taxonomy — Questioning That Deepens Thinking

We plan our questions as carefully as our activities, moving children beyond recall towards wondering, reasoning & explaining.

Pro-Risk & Barefoot Play

Climbing, balancing, digging & jumping build proprioception, core strength, resilience & genuine risk-assessment. We carry out a dynamic risk-benefit assessment, never a risk-removal one.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning (EYFS 2026)

Everything we plan is underpinned by the three Characteristics — **Playing & Exploring= hands, Active Learning=heart, Creating & Thinking Critically=head.**

We notice & celebrate **how** a child learns, not only what they have learned.



The EYFS — Areas of Learning & Development

The EYFS identifies seven areas of learning & development. The three Prime Areas are the foundation — they must be prioritised above all else. The four Specific Areas build upon this foundation.

At Play Days, all seven areas are richly resourced, purposefully planned & individually tailored — with PSED, Communication & Language & Physical Development always at the top of our priority list, for every child, every day.

Prime Areas

- Personal, Social & Emotional Development (PSED)
- Communication & Language
- Physical Development

Specific Areas

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts & Design



How We Plan — Following the Child

Our planning starts with the child, not solely with the topic. A topic will not always resonate with every child — so we plan meaningful activities & make ‘next step’ resources, materials, experiences & language genuinely accessible. That is what allows a child to move on from what they already know & can already do.

Personal interests are our way in. From there we focus deliberately on bridging gaps & building the enabling, empowering skills that carry a child forward — self-care & independence, a strong vocabulary bank & emotional resilience. The Prime Areas, in other words.

This matters in practice. Where planning becomes solely topic-driven, the focus can slide into curating a tuff tray to fit the topic rather than developing an **ever-evolving play & learning space** that grows as the child grows. Our provision is the second: planned, purposeful & continually shaped by the children in front of us.



Personal, Social & Emotional Development

PSED remains our single biggest priority. A child who feels safe, loved & emotionally secure will access learning with confidence. A child who is unsettled emotionally will struggle to access anything else. It really is that fundamental.

Our pre-school team use Emotion Coaching in every interaction. Children are supported to name, understand & manage their emotions — building the emotional vocabulary & self-regulation skills that will serve them throughout school & beyond.

Golden Rules & Brilliant Buddies

Our *Golden Rules* — Kind Hands, Good Listening & Brilliant Buddies — are embedded throughout the pre-school room. Children help to create & own these expectations. Brilliant Buddies celebrates acts of kindness, cooperation & positive behaviour in a way that is meaningful & motivating for every child.

This section should be read alongside our **Behaviour & Emotional Support Policy 2026**, which sets out our 'GO' behaviours, our Golden Rules, our Noise-o-meter, Brilliant Buddies & our step-by-step response in full.

Self-Regulation & Executive Function

We explicitly teach & practice self-regulation strategies — breathing techniques, sensory supports, visual timers, *'Think & a Drink'*, *'Rest & Reset /Calmer Corners'* our *Feelings Thermometer* & our quiet decompression spaces. These tools are for every child, embedded into our everyday routines, not reserved for those who find regulation difficult.

Social Skills & Friendships

We plan deliberately for the development of social skills — turn-taking, cooperation, negotiation, empathy & conflict resolution. Children practice these through structured activities, supported play & our rich role-play provision, always with the scaffolding of a skilled, observant adult.



Communication & Language

By the age of 3–5, language is doing extraordinary work. Children are using it to think, to question, to reason, to form friendships & to make sense of the world around them. We feed this with every interaction, every story, every song & every well-chosen question.

- **Daily Story Sessions** — rich, interactive, vocabulary-focused. We use a range of books, story sacks, Helicopter Stories & Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing approaches.
- **Vocabulary Planning** — our pre-school variation of the Vocabulary Flower used in the baby & toddler rooms. Each curriculum topic builds a targeted set of words, planned deliberately across word classes — nouns to name, verbs to do, adjectives to describe, alongside prepositions & connectives. New words are displayed, modelled, used, celebrated & shared with families via our Nursery in a Box parent portal.
- **Questioning Skills** — we use Bloom's Taxonomy to move from simple recall to genuine wonder & critical thinking.
- **Makaton & Multi-lingual (EAL) Support** — all children benefit from Makaton. Children with English as an Additional Language receive bespoke, sensitive support.
- **Talk Partners, Early Talk Boost & Group Discussions** — children are given regular, structured opportunities to share ideas, debate, explain & listen to one another.
- **Chatty Children & I CAN** — targeted speech & language strategies used across the room to build attention, listening & spoken language.



Physical Development

- Daily outdoor provision in all weathers
- Barefoot & risky play — log climbing, balancing, digging, mud kitchens

- Gross motor skills — running, jumping, climbing, ball skills, dance & movement
- Fine motor skills — threading, cutting, painting, playdough, tools & construction
- Health & self-care — toileting independence, healthy food, rest, handwashing, dressing



Literacy

- **Early phonics — listening & sound discrimination** — taught through joyful, multi-sensory play: environmental sounds, instrumental sounds, body percussion, rhythm & rhyme, alliteration, voice sounds & oral blending. These are the listening & sound-discrimination skills that all later phonics depends on.
- **Initial letter sounds** — introduced individually, following each child's readiness & interest, never as a whole-group expectation.
- **Aligned with our feeder schools** — we introduce age-appropriate, simplified versions of the formal literacy strategies used by our local schools (Phase 1 & 2 phonics, Read Write Inc. & Letters & Sounds principles), built towards the end of the Summer Term & subject to liaison with each school, so that children arrive in Reception ready to begin.
- **Environmental print, books & mark-making** — embedded throughout the provision
- **Reading for pleasure** — daily shared reading, well-stocked book corners & family lending libraries
- **Early writing** — drawing, emergent mark-making, name writing & purposeful writing in play
- **Story-making, Helicopter Stories & Talk for Writing** — we use Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing approach: children learn a story by heart through repeated telling, actions & story maps, then innovate on it by changing a character or setting, & finally invent a story of their own. This builds story language, narrative understanding & rich vocabulary long before pencil meets paper.
- **Focus stories** — chosen from children's interests, our areas of learning & supporting curriculum plans



Mathematics

- **Number sense first** — we build secure, deep understanding of small numbers rather than racing towards bigger ones. A child who genuinely understands 5 is better prepared for school than a child who can recite to 20.
- **Subitising** — recognising small quantities instantly, without counting: on dice, dominoes, fingers & in everyday play. This is the foundation of all early number work.
- **Cardinality & counting** — one-to-one correspondence, the stable order of number names & knowing that the last number counted tells us how many there are
- **Comparison** — more, fewer & the same; comparing sets & quantities in real contexts
- **Composition** — numbers are made of other numbers; 5 is 4 & 1, & 3 & 2
- **Pattern** — spotting, copying, continuing & creating patterns; the beginnings of mathematical reasoning
- **Shape, space & measure** — through construction, outdoor learning, sand & water, & real-world problem-solving
- **Mathematical language** — built deliberately & reinforced throughout the day, so that children have the words to explain their thinking
- **Aligned with our feeder schools** — our approach follows the six key areas of early mathematical learning & the mastery principles (small steps, depth of understanding before pace) used in our local primary schools, so that children arrive in Reception with secure foundations.



Preparing for School — The Early Learning Goals

The Early Learning Goals (ELGs) describe what most children will have achieved by the end of the reception year, age 5. At Play Days, we use these to ensure our pre-school curriculum is ambitious, well-sequenced & genuinely preparing children for this point.

By the time children leave Play Days & transition into Foundation & onto Reception, we aim for every child to be: confident, curious, emotionally resilient, communicative, physically capable & socially skilled. These qualities matter more than any individual learning objective.



Inclusion, Equality & SEND

Inclusive practice is not an add-on at Play Days — it is the foundation of everything we do. Every child in our pre-school belongs here fully & receives the support they need to thrive.

- Early identification — we observe, listen & act. Targeted support meetings focus on the three foundational areas of learning — Personal, Social & Emotional Development, Physical Development & Communication & Language — so that we intervene at the earliest opportunity. No concern is too small.
- SEND Passports, EHCP support & application — we work closely with families & the Local Authority to secure additional support where appropriate.
- SENCO & Early Language Lead oversight — across all rooms, with close working alongside specialist professionals.
- Adapted environments, resources & approaches — tailored to individual needs, including communication-enabling environments.
- Aspirational targets for every child, regardless of starting point



Transition to Primary School

We work closely with every feeder school in our area to ensure your child's transition is smooth; positive & builds upon everything they have achieved at Play Days.

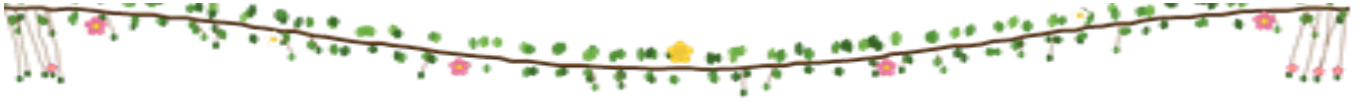
- Detailed Learning Journey Transition Reports — shared with the receiving school, with parental consent.
- Transition visits arranged both to & from our feeder schools, alongside the child's Key Person. Not all schools prioritise visits to settings, but we advocate strongly for our children & stress the benefit to both the child & the new school staff.
- 'All About Me' profiles completed with children & families
- School uniform dressing up, school bag practice & 'big school' conversations woven into our curriculum
- Parents fully informed & involved at every step



Working in Partnership with Families

- Nursery in a Box — observations, next steps & celebration of learning shared regularly
- Vocabulary Planning — woven into all our planning & shared each half term, so you can build the same words at home
- Termly topic newsletters with home activity ideas
- Stay & Play sessions — come in, join us on the floor & learn alongside your child
- Floor Learning Books — created with your children & shared with families
- **Next steps** — shared with you every half term, with practical ideas for what to practise at home

I CAN Statements — 3–5 Years



These statements reflect the typical developmental milestones we nurture across our pre-school provision. We share them openly so that you know what to expect at this stage — & so that we can work towards them together.

A word to parents

What happens at home matters more than anything that happens in a single session at Play Days: talking & listening, sharing books, eating together at the table, practicing self-care, & letting your child try, fail & try again. If you are unsure what to work on next, ask your child's Key Person. We will always tell you exactly where your child is, what comes next & what you can do at home to help.



Personal, Social & Emotional Development

- **Self-regulation** — I CAN manage my feelings with less help than I used to.
- **Conflict resolution** — I CAN sort out a falling-out, with a bit of support.
- **Empathy** — I CAN notice how someone else is feeling & think about it.
- **Routines & transitions** — I CAN follow what happens next with confidence.
- **Responsibility** — I CAN take on a job & see it through for my group.
- **Independence** — I CAN play on my own for a while & be happy doing it.
- **Separation** — I CAN play without my comforters & my dummy.



Physical Development

- **Dressing** — I CAN dress & undress myself with hardly any help.
- **Tool control** — I CAN use scissors, pencils & brushes with control.
- **Coordination** — I CAN move with balance & confidence.
- **Self-care** — I CAN look after my own hygiene; use the toilet, wash & dry my hands & face with growing independence.

Healthy choices — I CAN talk about food, rest & exercise, & why they matter



Communication & Language

- **Speaking** — I CAN talk in full sentences.
- **Group listening** — I CAN listen to my friends & answer them.
- **Story language** — I CAN retell a story using storyteller words.
- **Questioning** — I CAN ask questions to find out more.
- **Reasoning** — I CAN use words like 'because' to explain my thinking.
- **Vocabulary** — I CAN use new words & know what they mean.



Literacy

- **Rhyme & rhythm** — I CAN hear & join in with rhyme, rhythm & alliteration.
- **Syllables** — I CAN clap the beats in my name & in words I know.
- **Initial sounds** — I CAN hear the first sound in a word & say it.
- **Oral blending** — I CAN hear c-a-t & know it says cat.
- **Book talk** — I CAN talk about books, authors & the people in the story.
- **Storytelling** — I CAN retell a story I know & make up one of my own.
- **Mark-making** — I CAN make marks on purpose & have a go at writing my name.



Mathematics

- **Subitising** — I CAN look at a small group & know how many, without counting.
- **Cardinality** — I CAN count things & know the last number tells me how many.
- **Counting** — I CAN say number names in order & keep going as far as I can.
- **Comparison** — I CAN say which group has more, fewer or the same.
- **Composition** — I CAN see that 5 is made of 4 & 1.
- **Shape** — I CAN name & describe simple shapes.
- **Pattern** — I CAN spot a pattern, copy it & keep it going.
- **Mathematical talk** — I CAN use maths words to explain what I am doing.



Understanding the World

- **My family & me** — I CAN talk about my family & the people who care for me.
- **My community** — I CAN talk about the people who help us.
- **Living things** — I CAN plant a seed & look after it as it grows.
- **Seasons & change** — I CAN notice & talk about the seasons changing.
- **Investigation** — I CAN find out how something works & say what I think will happen.
- **Similarities & differences** — I CAN talk about places & people that are different from me.
- **Technology** — I CAN use simple technology with support.



Expressive Arts & Design

- **Choosing & planning** — I CAN choose my own materials & make my own plan.
- **Persistence** — I CAN keep going with my work & come back to it another day.
- **Talking about my work** — I CAN say what I made & what I was thinking.
- **Colour** — I CAN mix colours & notice what happens.
- **Making & building** — I CAN join, cut, build & shape to make what I want.
- **Singing** — I CAN sing a whole song from memory.
- **Music** — I CAN play an instrument to show how I feel.
- **Role play** — I CAN take on a role & stay in it with my friends.

Helping Hands • Happy Hearts • Healthy Minds



Mel, Tracy, Gemma & the entire Play Days Pre-School Teams

