

YMCA Stepping Stones Nursery

Curriculum and Assessment Policy

Department: Early Years and Childcare

Owner: Angelina Brett

Approval Route: YSS Trustee Board

Frequency of Revision: Annual

Version	Date Approved	Reason for Update
V1	September 2026	New Policy

Policy Statement

At YMCA Stepping Stones, we believe every child deserves the very best start in life. We provide a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum that supports children to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to become confident, successful learners. Our curriculum is underpinned by the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and reflects our commitment to supporting children's communication and language, emotional wellbeing, independence and love of learning. The policy supports the EYFS requirements for learning and development, partnership with parents and assessment including the progress check at age two.

We recognise that children learn best through secure relationships, meaningful experiences and opportunities to explore their environment. Our curriculum is designed to build on what children already know, celebrate their individuality and ensure they make progress from their own starting points.

Assessment is an integral part of our practice and is used to identify strengths and next steps, celebrate achievements and ensure that all children are supported to achieve their potential.

Curriculum Intent

At YMCA Stepping Stones, we intend that children leave us as confident communicators, independent learners and active explorers who are emotionally secure, curious about the world around them and ready for their next stage of learning.

Through nurturing relationships, rich language experiences, meaningful outdoor learning and child-centred experiences, we support every child to develop the skills, knowledge and

attitudes they need to thrive now and in the future. Our curriculum is designed to foster resilience, creativity, wellbeing, respect for others and a lifelong love of learning.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Head of Early Years and Childcare Development and the Nursery Manager are responsible for ensuring that the curriculum meets statutory requirements and reflects the needs of the children attending the setting. They monitor the quality of care, learning and assessment, support professional development and ensure that assessment information is used effectively to improve outcomes for children.

The SENCO plays an important role in monitoring the progress of children with additional needs, coordinating support and working in partnership with families and external professionals to ensure children receive appropriate intervention and assistance.

Key Persons are responsible for developing secure relationships with children and families, understanding each child's interests and developmental needs, and using observations and assessment information to plan meaningful learning experiences. They maintain children's records through EY Works and contribute to statutory assessments and progress reviews.

All practitioners are responsible for implementing the curriculum, observing children's learning, reflecting on practice and providing high-quality interactions that promote children's development and wellbeing.

Our Curriculum

At YMCA Stepping Stones, our curriculum is carefully designed to support children's learning and development across all seven areas of learning within the EYFS. We recognise that the prime areas of Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Physical Development provide the foundations for future learning and success. These areas are prioritised throughout children's experiences and are strengthened through high-quality interactions and carefully planned opportunities for learning.

Our curriculum is shaped by our knowledge of child development, the interests and experiences of the children and our understanding of what children need to know and be able to do as they move through the setting and prepare for school. Communication and language are at the heart of everything we do because we recognise that language underpins children's learning, relationships, wellbeing and future achievement.

Our curriculum is progressive and carefully sequenced to support children in building knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Practitioners consider children's starting points and use ongoing assessment to plan experiences that extend learning and deepen understanding. Through responsive, meaningful interactions and well-planned

opportunities for exploration, children become increasingly confident, independent and capable learners as they move through the setting towards school readiness.

Children learn through a balance of child-initiated play, adult-guided experiences and purposeful interactions. Practitioners create stimulating and engaging environments that encourage curiosity, exploration, creativity and problem solving. Through these experiences, children develop the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning: Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, and Creating and Thinking Critically.

Our curriculum promotes equality, diversity and inclusion and reflects the unique backgrounds, experiences and identities of the children and families within our community. We strive to ensure that every child develops confidence, resilience, independence and a strong sense of belonging.

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor learning is a fundamental part of life at YMCA Stepping Stones and forms an integral element of our curriculum. We believe that outdoor experiences provide unique opportunities for children to explore, investigate and learn in ways that cannot always be replicated indoors.

Children have regular opportunities to engage with natural environments, open-ended resources and real-life experiences that support their learning across all areas of development. Through outdoor learning, children develop physical skills, confidence, resilience, independence and an understanding of the world around them.

Our practitioners carefully use the outdoor environment to extend children's interests, support language development and encourage collaboration, creativity and problem solving. Children are encouraged to explore, experiment, take appropriate risks and develop a sense of responsibility for themselves, others and their environment.

We recognise the significant contribution that outdoor learning makes to children's emotional wellbeing and mental health. Through daily opportunities to play and learn outdoors, children develop a lifelong appreciation for nature, physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Assessment

Assessment at YMCA Stepping Stones is an ongoing process that enables practitioners to understand children's development and learning. We believe assessment should be meaningful, manageable and focused on improving outcomes for children.

Assessment is embedded within everyday practice and is based on practitioners' observations, interactions and professional knowledge of each child. We recognise that effective assessment takes place through high-quality engagement with children and should not create unnecessary paperwork. Assessment is therefore used as a tool to inform planning, monitor progress and support children's learning.

Information gathered through assessment helps practitioners identify children's strengths, recognise areas where additional support may be needed and plan appropriate next steps in learning. Assessment also contributes to the early identification of children who may benefit from targeted intervention or additional support.

Children's achievements are valued across all aspects of their learning, including experiences that take place outdoors, within the wider community and at home.

YMCA Stepping Stones uses EY Works as its electronic assessment and learning journal platform.

EY Works enables practitioners to record significant observations, celebrate achievements and monitor children's progress across the curriculum. The system supports effective communication with parents and provides a clear overview of each child's learning journey.

Assessment data is reviewed termly through EY Works to monitor individual and cohort progress. This analysis supports practitioners and leaders in identifying strengths, monitoring vulnerable groups, evaluating the impact of the curriculum and informing future planning. EY Works is also used to record and monitor ECAT assessments and statutory progress checks for 2-year-olds.

Communication and Language Development

Communication and language are central to our curriculum and underpin all aspects of children's learning and development.

Practitioners create language-rich environments where children are encouraged to listen, understand, express themselves and develop confidence as communicators. Through stories, songs, rhymes, conversations, play experiences and sustained shared thinking, children are supported to develop a broad vocabulary and strong communication skills.

To support this priority, YMCA Stepping Stones uses the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) approach. ECAT assessments help practitioners monitor children's speech, language and communication development, identify children who may need additional support and plan targeted interventions where required. Assessment information is reviewed regularly and recorded through EY Works.

Progress Check at Age Two

In accordance with statutory requirements, a Progress Check is completed for children between the ages of two and three. The review summarises children's development within the prime areas of learning and identifies strengths, areas for development and any emerging concerns.

The Progress Check is completed in partnership with parents and carers and provides an opportunity to discuss children's progress and agree any additional support that may be

beneficial. Where concerns are identified, appropriate advice and support will be sought in partnership with families.

The completed review is recorded within EY Works and contributes to the setting's overall understanding of the child's development and next steps.

Supporting Children with Additional Needs

YMCA Stepping Stones is committed to providing an inclusive environment where all children can participate fully and achieve their potential.

Assessment information contributes to the early identification of children who may have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). Where concerns arise, practitioners work closely with families, the SENCO and relevant professionals to plan and implement appropriate support. Children's progress is monitored regularly to ensure interventions are effective and responsive to individual needs.

We are committed to ensuring that barriers to learning are identified and addressed as early as possible so that every child can flourish.

Partnership with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers are children's first and most important educators. We value their knowledge of their child and recognise the vital role they play in supporting children's learning and development.

We work in partnership with families through daily communication, review meetings, discussions about children's progress and the use of EY Works. Parents are encouraged to contribute to their child's learning journey, share achievements from home and participate in discussions about next steps and future development.

Strong partnerships between home and the setting enable us to build a fuller understanding of each child and help ensure consistency and continuity in children's learning experiences.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The quality and effectiveness of the curriculum and assessment processes are monitored regularly by the Head of Early Years and Childcare Development, the Nursery Manager and leadership team.

Monitoring includes the review of assessment information, learning walks, observation of practice, professional discussions with staff and feedback from children and families. Findings are used to celebrate strengths, identify priorities for development and ensure the curriculum remains ambitious, inclusive and responsive to the needs of children and families.

Through ongoing reflection and continuous improvement, YMCA Stepping Stones seeks to provide the highest quality early education and care for every child.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed biennially, or sooner if there are significant changes to curriculum practice, assessment arrangements or relevant legislation.