Little Acorns Montessori

Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy

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Author / Owner	Jonathan Duffy
Approved By	Director
Sites Covered	Ascot Campus | Bracknell Campus | Crowthorne Campus
Statutory Framework	EYFS Statutory Framework for Group Providers (DfE, 2025); SEND Code of Practice 0-25 (DfE/DoH, 2015); Children and Families Act 2014; Equality Act 2010

Applies to: All staff, management, students, and volunteers across all Little Acorns Montessori campuses.

1. Policy Statement

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to providing a high-quality, inclusive early years education that meets the individual needs of every child, including those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

We believe that all children have the right to be valued, respected, and supported to achieve their full potential. Every child is a unique learner, and our approach to SEND provision reflects our broader Montessori philosophy of following the child.

This policy sets out how Little Acorns Montessori identifies, assesses, and provides for children with SEND across all three campuses: **Ascot**, **Bracknell**, and **Crowthorne**. It applies to all children aged 0-5 attending our settings.

Our Core Commitments

- Every child with SEND is entitled to a broad, balanced, and relevant curriculum.
- Inclusion is not an add-on; it is embedded in all aspects of daily life at our nurseries.
- Early identification and timely intervention improve long-term outcomes for children.
- Parents and carers are equal partners in all decisions relating to their child's SEND support.
- We will make **reasonable adjustments** under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure no child is disadvantaged.
- All children with SEND are treated with dignity, and positive images of disability and difference are promoted throughout our settings.

2. Statutory Framework and Legal Basis

This policy has been written to comply with, and must be read alongside, the following legislation and statutory guidance:

Legislation / Guidance	Relevance to This Policy
EYFS Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers (DfE, 2025) - mandatory from 1 September 2025	Section 3.68 requires providers to have arrangements to support children with SEN or disabilities. Settings must identify a SENCO. The graduated approach to identification and support is expected.
SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years (DfE/DoH, 2015)	Statutory guidance under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Paragraphs 5.4-5.61 set out requirements for early years providers, including the Graduated Approach (Assess, Plan, Do, Review).
Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3)	Places a legal duty on local authorities and providers to identify, assess, and support children with SEND. Introduces Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.
Equality Act 2010	Requires providers to make reasonable adjustments to avoid substantial disadvantage to disabled children. SEND and disability are protected characteristics.
Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2023)	Relevant where SEND intersects with safeguarding concerns; practitioners must consider the heightened vulnerability of some children with SEND.
Keeping Children Safe in Education / Early Years (DfE, 2024)	Informs practice where SEND intersects with safeguarding concerns in early years settings.

Note on the EYFS 2025 update: The revised EYFS Statutory Framework, effective 1 September 2025, strengthens safeguarding and welfare requirements. All references in this policy are to the 2025 version. This policy has been reviewed and updated accordingly.

Note on the SEND Code of Practice (2015): The 2015 Code remains the current statutory document at the date of this policy. However, the government has confirmed that a revised Code of Practice will be published as part of the SEND reform programme. The first phase of alignment with reformed best practice begins in the 2025/26 academic year. This policy will be reviewed and updated as soon as the revised Code is issued.

3. Aims and Objectives

Little Acorns Montessori aims to:

- Provide a welcoming, stimulating, and inclusive environment in which all children, including those with SEND, can thrive.
- Identify children with SEND at the earliest possible stage, using the Graduated Approach of Assess, Plan, Do, Review.
- Ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities to children with SEND and are equipped to deliver high-quality, differentiated support.
- Work in genuine partnership with parents, carers, and external professionals to agree, implement, and review support plans.
- Liaise with the local authority and specialist services, including those in Bracknell Forest Borough, to ensure children receive any additional statutory entitlements.
- Promote the physical and emotional well-being of children with SEND in all aspects of nursery life.
- Maintain accurate, confidential records of SEND identification, assessment, and provision.
- Review and evaluate this policy at least annually to ensure continued compliance.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator)

Under the SEND Code of Practice (2015, para. 5.53) and the EYFS Statutory Framework (2025), all group early years providers **must** identify a named SENCO. At Little Acorns Montessori, the SENCOs (and other key contacts) are:

Role	Name	Campus
Designated Officer / Nominated Individual	Jonathan Duffy	All Campuses
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Manager	Elaine Eastham	Ascot Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Manager	Agata Payne	Bracknell Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Manager	Emma Gray	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) and Deputy Manager	Jessica McGrath/Katy Cooley	Ascot Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) and Deputy Manager	Joanne Broughton	Bracknell Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL) and Deputy Manager	Martine Loveridge	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Kira King	Crowthorne Campus (in the absence of Emma and Martine)
Manager on Duty	As rostered	All Campuses
SENDCO	Agata Payne	Bracknell Campus
SENDCO	Elaine Eastham	Ascot Campus
SENDCO	Martine Loveridge/Emma Gray	Crowthorne Campus

The SENCO's role includes, but is not limited to:

- Ensuring all practitioners understand their responsibilities to children with SEND and the setting's approach to identifying and meeting their needs.
- Advising and supporting colleagues in day-to-day SEND practice.
- Ensuring parents and carers are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform any actions taken.
- Liaising with external professionals and agencies beyond the setting.
- Co-ordinating the Graduated Approach (Assess, Plan, Do, Review) for each child identified with SEND.
- Maintaining and overseeing SEND records and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) / Support Plans.
- Attending relevant training and cascading learning to the staff team during staff meetings.
- Supporting the transition process when children move to school or other settings.

The SENCO, with the support of the Nursery Manager, monitors and takes day-to-day responsibility for SEND provision in line with the needs and progress of individual children.

4.2 Nursery Manager / Setting Leader

- Ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across all campuses.
- Supporting the SENCO in securing resources and arranging adjustments to the environment or staffing where required.
- Acting as the point of escalation for complaints about SEND provision (see Section 13).
- Ensuring all staff receive appropriate SEND training on induction and on an ongoing basis.
- Notifying the local authority (Bracknell Forest Borough Council) where a child may require an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment.

4.3 All Practitioners and Key Persons

- Being alert to early signs that a child may have SEND and raising concerns promptly with the SENCO.
- Implementing agreed support strategies and recording observations accurately.
- Maintaining the highest standards of inclusive practice in all activities and routines.
- Ensuring parents are kept informed of their child's progress and any emerging concerns on a regular basis.
- Attending SEND training and development sessions as required.
- Maintaining confidentiality regarding individual children's SEND information.

4.4 Parents and Carers

Parents and carers are central to all decisions affecting their child. Their rights and responsibilities include:

- Being informed of any concerns about their child's development at the earliest opportunity.
- Actively participating in Assess, Plan, Do, Review meetings and contributing their knowledge of their child.
- Providing consent before information about their child's SEND is shared with external professionals.
- Working in partnership with the setting to implement agreed strategies consistently at home where practicable.
- Raising concerns or questions with the Key Person or SENCO at any time.

5. Admission Arrangements for Children with SEND

Little Acorns Montessori does not discriminate against children on the grounds of SEND or disability. We welcome all children and will make **reasonable adjustments** as required by the Equality Act 2010.

Children with SEND will be admitted following consultation between parents/carers, the setting manager, and the Key Person. Prior to a child's admission, parents/carers will be asked - **with their consent** - to provide details of any known SEND to the SENCO and any relevant Key Person.

Information shared at this stage will be used solely to plan appropriate provision and will be held confidentially in line with our Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy.

Every reasonable effort will be made, with parental consent, to contact any relevant outside professionals involved in a child's support prior to admission, so that provision is in place from the child's first day.

For more information please see our Admissions Policy.

6. Identification, Assessment, and the Graduated Approach

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) and the EYFS Statutory Framework (2025) require all settings to adopt a **Graduated Approach** to identifying and supporting children with SEND. This is a cyclical, evidence-based process comprising four stages:

6.1 The Graduated Approach: Assess - Plan - Do - Review

Stage	What This Means at Little Acorns Montessori
ASSESS	The Key Person, in consultation with the SENCO and parents, carries out a thorough assessment of the child's needs across all EYFS areas of learning. Observations, developmental checks, parental insight, and information from health professionals all contribute.
PLAN	An IEP or Support Plan is written collaboratively with parents, setting out 3-4 short-term, SMART targets for development. Strategies, resources, and responsibilities are agreed. External professional advice is incorporated where available.
DO	Agreed strategies are implemented consistently across daily routines and activities. The Key Person leads day-to-day support, guided by the SENCO. Observations and evidence are collected to record what is working and what requires adjustment.
REVIEW	Progress is reviewed against agreed targets, usually at least every half-term (approximately every 6-8 weeks), or sooner if the child's needs change. Reviews are conducted with parents and, where appropriate, external professionals. The outcome informs the next Assess stage.

6.2 Four Broad Areas of SEND Need

In line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015, Chapter 6), we consider four broad areas of need:

- **Communication and Interaction** - including speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), and autism spectrum conditions.
- **Cognition and Learning** - including moderate, severe, or specific learning difficulties.
- **Social, Emotional and Mental Health** - including difficulties with self-regulation, attention, and social interaction.
- **Sensory and/or Physical** - including hearing impairment, visual impairment, and physical disabilities.

A child's needs may span more than one area, and these may change over time. Difficulty related solely to learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) is **not** SEND.

6.3 Early Identification Process - Step by Step

- **Step 1 - Initial concern raised:** Any member of staff, or a parent/carer, raises a concern about a child's development with the child's Key Person.
- **Step 2 - Key Person observation:** The Key Person carries out focused observations and shares findings informally with the SENCO.
- **Step 3 - SENCO consultation:** The SENCO reviews observations and developmental records. If a concern is substantiated, the SENCO arranges a meeting with parents/carers.
- **Step 4 - Parent consultation:** The SENCO and Key Person meet with parents to discuss observations, share concerns sensitively, and gather parental insight. No formal SEND identification is made without parental involvement.
- **Step 5 - SEN Support initiated:** If a child is identified as requiring SEN Support, the SENCO registers the child on the SEND register and an IEP or Support Plan is developed collaboratively.
- **Step 6 - External referral (if required):** With parental consent, the SENCO may refer the child to relevant external services. The local authority SEND team at Bracknell Forest Borough Council will be contacted where an EHC needs assessment may be required.
- **Step 7 - Ongoing monitoring:** The Graduated Approach cycle (Assess - Plan - Do - Review) continues until the child no longer requires SEND support, or transitions to another setting.

7. Provision and Facilities for Children with SEND

7.1 Individual Education Plans (IEPs) / Support Plans

Every child identified as requiring SEN Support must have an IEP or equivalent Support Plan. IEPs must:

- Be written collaboratively with parents and, where appropriate, the child.
- Include 3-4 short-term, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) targets.
- Specify strategies, resources, and the adult responsible for each target.
- Be reviewed at least every half-term (or sooner if the child's needs change significantly).
- Be stored securely on the child's individual SEND file and shared with parents at each review.

7.2 Staffing and Key Person System

Our Key Person system ensures that each child with SEND has a named adult with particular responsibility for their care, learning, and emotional well-being. The Key Person:

- Provides consistent support and builds a trusting relationship with the child and family.
- Implements IEP strategies in all daily routines and activities.
- Maintains observations and progress notes for the SEND record.
- Communicates daily with parents and carers and reports to the SENCO.

Where additional 1:1 or small-group support is required, the SENCO and Manager will agree staffing arrangements, taking into account EYFS ratio requirements and the individual child's needs.

7.3 Resources and Environment

Little Acorns Montessori maintains a wide range of resources and specialist play equipment that can be adapted and deployed to meet individual children's needs. Our environments are reviewed regularly to ensure they are accessible and supportive for children with SEND.

7.4 Disability Access Funding (DAF)

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) is government funding available to support early years settings in making reasonable adjustments and building capacity to include children with SEND.

Eligibility: Children from 9 months to school age who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and are accessing a government-funded early years entitlement place are eligible for DAF. DAF eligibility was extended from 2024/25 to include eligible children from 9 months old accessing entitlement places.

The setting will:

- Proactively identify children who may be eligible for DAF and inform parents/carers at the earliest opportunity.
- Support parents in providing evidence of DLA entitlement and complete the DAF application to Bracknell Forest Borough Council on the family's behalf.
- Use DAF funding, in partnership with parents, to make adjustments to provision, purchase specialist resources, or fund staff training to support the eligible child's inclusion.
- Maintain a record of how DAF has been spent for each eligible child.

The current DAF rate is set by Bracknell Forest Borough Council and is reviewed annually. The setting will check the council's provider portal for the current rate before submitting any DAF application

7.5 Physical Accessibility

- Wide entrance doors accessible by wheelchair.
- Ramped access at all campus entrances.
- Play areas on a single level.
- Suitable accessible toilet and changing facilities.
- The setting will assess each child's individual access needs on admission and make every reasonable effort to adapt facilities as appropriate under the Equality Act 2010.

8. Recording and Reporting

8.1 Records to Be Maintained

- **SEND Register:** A confidential register of all children currently receiving SEN Support, maintained by the SENCO for each campus.
- **Individual SEND File:** Each child on the SEND register must have a dedicated file containing: completed IEPs and review records; observation notes and assessment evidence; correspondence with parents; referral letters and external professional reports; consent forms.
- **Key Person Observation Notes:** Ongoing, dated observations relevant to the child's targets, recorded on the nursery's observation system.
- **Review Meeting Records:** A written record of every review meeting, signed by the Key Person, SENCO, and parent/carer. Copies provided to parents.

8.2 Storage and Confidentiality

- All physical SEND records are stored in a locked cabinet in the Manager's office, accessible only to the SENCO, Nursery Manager, and authorised staff.
- Digital records are stored in a secure, password-protected system in line with UK GDPR and our Data Protection Policy.
- SEND records are retained in line with our Record Retention Policy and current data protection legislation.
- Information is shared with external professionals only with **explicit written consent** from parents/carers, except where there is a safeguarding concern.

8.3 Reporting to Parents

- Parents will receive a verbal or written update at every IEP review (at least half-termly).
- Progress against IEP targets will be shared and the next cycle of targets agreed jointly.
- Parents will be informed promptly of any referral to an external agency.
- The SENCO is available to meet with parents at any time, by arrangement.

9. Partnership with Parents, Carers, and External Agencies

9.1 Partnership with Parents and Carers

We recognise that parents and guardians are the primary experts on their child. Our approach ensures:

- Parents are consulted and actively involved in all stages of the Graduated Approach.
- The child's progress and achievements are shared with parents regularly.
- Parents are informed of the identity of their child's Key Person and SENCO at admission.
- Parents are made aware of all admission, inclusion, and SEND arrangements.
- The setting draws upon parental knowledge and expertise when planning provision.

9.2 Partnership with External Agencies

With parental consent, we work in liaison with relevant professionals and agencies. These may include:

- Social Services
- Health Services (including Health Visitors and Paediatricians)
- SEN Advisory Services (Bracknell Forest Borough Council)
- Educational Psychologists
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Behaviour Support Services
- Advisory Teachers and Early Years Inclusion Officers
- Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists
- Local Authority Area SENCO (Bracknell Forest Borough Council)

Where a child may require an EHC needs assessment, the Nursery Manager and SENCO will support parents in making a referral to the Local Authority, or will refer directly with parental consent.

10. Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans

Some children with more complex or significant needs may require an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, issued by the Local Authority under the Children and Families Act 2014.

If the setting, parents, or an external professional believes a child may meet the threshold for an EHC needs assessment, the SENCO will:

- Discuss the possibility of an EHC needs assessment with parents/carers at the earliest opportunity.
- Compile a portfolio of evidence demonstrating the child's needs and the support already provided (including all IEP reviews).
- Support parents in submitting a request to Bracknell Forest Borough Council, or submit a professional referral with parental consent.
- Continue to implement SEN Support provision while the EHC assessment is underway.
- Actively contribute to the EHC needs assessment process by providing written evidence and attending professionals' meetings.
- Implement the provision specified in any agreed EHC Plan from the date it is issued.

11. Transitions

Transitions - whether between rooms, campuses, or to school - can be particularly challenging for children with SEND. Little Acorns Montessori will:

- Begin planning for transitions well in advance, in partnership with parents and receiving settings.
- Share relevant SEND information (with written parental consent) with receiving schools or settings to ensure continuity of support.
- Arrange additional settling-in visits or graduated transition programmes for children with SEND where appropriate.
- Invite the receiving school's SENCO to visit the child at the nursery, where practicable.
- Ensure all IEP documentation and assessment evidence is passed to the receiving setting.

12. Staff Training and Development

All staff at Little Acorns Montessori **must** have sufficient knowledge and skills to support children with SEND. Our approach to training includes:

- SEND awareness training is included in the induction programme for all new staff.
- All staff attend in-service training on SEND arranged by the appropriate professional bodies or local authority.
- The SENCO attends specialist SENCO training and networks, and feedback is shared with the staff team at regular staff meetings.
- Staff are supported to keep themselves updated on SEND developments through relevant reading, webinars, and professional development opportunities.
- Training needs are identified during supervision and appraisal and addressed through the setting's training plan.
- In line with the DfE's Early Years SENCO Qualification Specification (2018), the SENCO role at Little Acorns Montessori is expected to be held by a practitioner qualified to at least Level 3 in Early Years. The setting will support SENCOs to access the Level 3 Award for SENCOs in Early Years Settings as the recognised continuing professional development route for PVI settings.

13. Complaints Procedure

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to resolving any concerns about SEND provision promptly and sensitively.

- **Step 1:** Parents should raise any concerns with the child's Key Person or SENCO in the first instance. In most cases, concerns can be resolved informally at this stage.
- **Step 2:** If the concern remains unresolved, it should be raised formally with the Nursery Manager.
- **Step 3:** If the complaint is not resolved to the parent's satisfaction at setting level, it should be addressed to the **Area SENCO at Bracknell Forest Borough Council**.
- **Step 4:** Parents may also contact Ofsted or seek independent advice from the local authority's SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).

All complaints relating to SEND are handled in accordance with our full Complaints Policy.

14. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed and evaluated at least annually, or sooner in the event of changes to legislation, statutory guidance, or Ofsted inspection frameworks.

The review will assess the effectiveness of:

- The identification and assessment procedures used across all campuses.
- Individual Education Plans and the outcomes achieved for children with SEND.
- The quality and impact of staff training.
- Partnership arrangements with parents, carers, and external agencies.
- The physical accessibility and resource provision at each campus.
- Curriculum planning and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of all children, including those with SEND.

The outcomes of the policy review will be shared with staff and, in summary form, with parents and carers. Any required amendments will be implemented promptly.

Given the scale of proposed change under the government's SEND reform programme, this policy may require interim review before June 2027. The Director, Nursery Managers and SENCOs will monitor publications from the DfE, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, and the Early Years Alliance, and will initiate an unscheduled review if the revised SEND Code of Practice, National Inclusion Standards, or the Childcare and Early Education Review are published in the interim period.

15. Related Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Key Person Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Record Retention Policy
- Transitions Policy

16. Authorisation

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner in the event of any changes in legislation or guidance, or following any safeguarding incident. The next scheduled review date is June 2027.

Policy Author	Jonathan Duffy

Date	June 2026

Next Review Date: **June 2027**