

LITTLE ACORNS MONTESSORI

Ascot · Bracknell · Crowthorne

VOLUNTEERS AND WORK EXPERIENCE POLICY

Document Title	Volunteers and Work Experience Policy
Setting	Little Acorns Montessori — Ascot, Bracknell and Crowthorne nurseries
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Review Date	September 2027 — reviewed at least annually, or sooner following any change in legislation or an incident]
Author	Jonathan Duffy - Director
Applies To	All staff, students, volunteers, and Little Acorns Montessori management across all locations

1. Policy Statement

Little Acorns Montessori welcomes volunteers and work experience students who wish to gain experience of the early years sector, provided their presence never compromises the safety, welfare, or wellbeing of the children in our care.

We are committed to providing a safe, secure, and nurturing environment for all children aged 0–5 across our Ascot, Bracknell, and Crowthorne settings. Every adult who spends time in our nursery, in whatever capacity, is subject to the same standards of suitability, supervision, and conduct.

This policy sets out how we recruit, vet, induct, supervise, and support volunteers and work experience students, and how we meet our statutory duties under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework and related UK safeguarding legislation.

A note on terminology: for the purposes of this policy, a “volunteer” includes any unpaid person assisting the nursery on a regular or occasional basis (including parent helpers), and a “work experience student” includes any person on a school, college, or university placement, whether short-term or long-term. Both are treated identically under this policy for vetting and supervision purposes: the law does not offer work experience students a lighter test than volunteers. Neither category includes agency or bank staff, who are covered by the Recruitment and Safer Recruitment Policy.

2. Statutory Framework

This policy fulfils Little Acorns Montessori's duties under the Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers (Department for Education, effective 1 September 2026), in particular:

- Paragraph 3.4 — the requirement to designate a lead practitioner for safeguarding (the DSL).
- Paragraph 3.7 — the requirement for whistleblowing procedures to cover all staff, including students and volunteers.
- Paragraphs 3.13–3.16 (“Suitable people”) — the requirement that every person who may have regular contact with children, including volunteers and students, is suitable, and that an enhanced criminal records and barred list check is obtained for every person aged 16 or over who works directly with children or on the premises.

- Paragraphs 3.17–3.19 — the requirement that no individual begins working or volunteering until their enhanced DBS and barred list check has been received, and that no one whose suitability has not been checked has unsupervised contact with children.
- Paragraphs 3.20–3.21 (“References”) — the requirement to obtain at least one written, verifiable reference for any member of staff, student, or volunteer before they are recruited.
- Paragraph 3.57 — the conditions under which students and long-term volunteers aged 17 or over may be included in staff:child ratios, and the prohibition on anyone under 17 being left in sole charge of children.
- Paragraph 3.35 — supervision arrangements for anyone in contact with children and families.
- Section 3.95–3.98 (“Information and record keeping”) — the requirement to maintain accurate, secure records.

This policy also has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Childcare Act 2006 (sections 39–40), which gives the EYFS legal force.
- Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2012.
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, as amended by the Crime and Policing Act 2026. Effective 1 September 2026, this removed the previous “supervision exemption”, under which an unpaid volunteer, helper, or student who was directly supervised by someone already in regulated activity did not themselves count as being in regulated activity, regardless of how often they attended. Supervision on its own no longer has that effect. From 1 September 2026, any unpaid person — including volunteers, helpers, and work experience students — who teaches, trains, instructs, cares for, or supervises children is in regulated activity, and therefore requires an enhanced DBS check with children's barred list information, unless they help out on no more than three days in any rolling 30-day period and provide no overnight care (2am–6am) or personal care. See GOV.UK, Regulated activity: removal of the supervision exemption (comes into force 1 September 2026).
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (regulated activity and barring provisions).
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions Order 1975), as it applies to regulated activity with children.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (had regard to, as good practice, where relevant to placements linked to schools).
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (the Prevent duty).
- Equality Act 2010.
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Where this policy uses “must”, the action is a statutory requirement. Where it uses “should”, the action reflects best practice that staff are expected to follow unless there is good reason not to.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All volunteers, including parent helpers, community volunteers, and governors or trustees who visit rooms.
- All work experience students placed with us through a school, college, university, or training provider.
- All staff, who are responsible for supervising and supporting volunteers and students.
- Management at each of our Ascot, Bracknell, and Crowthorne settings, who are responsible for implementing this policy consistently across all sites.

4. Detailed Procedures

4.1 Before a placement is agreed

1. Any request for a volunteer or work experience placement must be directed to the Nursery Manager. Staff must not informally agree to a placement.
2. The Manager must obtain the following before any placement is confirmed: full name, date of birth, home address, and the name of the referring school, college, university, or organisation.
3. The Manager and DSL must jointly assess whether the placement is appropriate, considering the age and needs of the children, staffing levels, and the length and nature of the placement.
4. The prospective volunteer or student must complete an application or placement form declaring any information that may affect their suitability to work with children, including arrests, charges, convictions, cautions, court orders, reprimands and warnings, whether received before or during the placement.
5. The Manager must obtain at least one written reference before the individual is recruited to the placement. References must:
 - Not be an open reference (for example, “to whom it may concern”).
 - Not be obtained by the applicant themselves.
 - Come from the applicant's current employer, school, college, university, or training provider, and be completed by a senior person with appropriate authority.
 - Not come from a family member.
6. The Manager must apply for an enhanced DBS check and barred list check for every volunteer or student aged 16 or over who will work directly with children or be present on the premises while children are there, unless the person qualifies for the narrow exemption described in Section 2 above (helping for fewer than three days in a 30-day period, with no overnight or personal care).
7. The individual must not begin their placement, and must not attend the premises unsupervised at any time when children are present, until the enhanced DBS and barred list check has been received and reviewed by the Manager or DSL.
8. Where a check reveals information relevant to suitability, the DSL must assess this before any placement proceeds, and may decline or withdraw the offer of a placement.

4.2 Work experience students and the DBS threshold

Work experience students are not a separate, lighter category for vetting purposes. From 1 September 2026, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 removed the “supervision exemption” that previously allowed a closely supervised volunteer or student to avoid an enhanced DBS check regardless of placement length. Supervision alone no longer exempts anyone.

In practice, this means:

- A placement of three days or fewer within any rolling 30-day period, with no overnight care and no personal care, does not require an enhanced DBS and barred list check, though the Manager may still choose to request a basic check for reassurance.
- A placement of more than three days within any rolling 30-day period — which includes most typical school work experience weeks (usually five consecutive days) — does require an enhanced DBS and barred list check, obtained before the placement starts, regardless of how closely the student will be supervised.
- Any placement involving personal care (for example, nappy changing or toileting support) requires an enhanced DBS and barred list check irrespective of length.

The Manager must calculate the likely length of every proposed work experience placement against this threshold before agreeing dates with the referring school or college, and must build the DBS application timeline into the placement offer accordingly, since applications cannot be processed retrospectively.

4.3 Induction (first day)

9. Every volunteer and student must complete an induction before having any contact with children. Induction must cover:
 - This policy and the setting's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
 - The name of the DSL and Deputy DSL, and how to report a concern.
 - The Whistleblowing Policy and procedure.
 - Fire and emergency evacuation procedures.
 - Health and safety, hygiene, and infection control procedures.
 - Confidentiality and the use of mobile phones, cameras, and imaging devices on the premises.
 - Behaviour management expectations, including that corporal punishment is never permitted.
10. The Manager must record that induction has taken place, with the date and the name of the staff member who delivered it, on the individual's record.
11. Students on longer placements should also be introduced to the key children's routines and the room's daily schedule by their supervising member of staff.

4.4 During the placement

12. Volunteers and work experience students must be supervised directly by a qualified member of staff at all times. They must never be left alone with a child or children, and must never take sole responsibility for a child's care, supervision, or safety.
13. Anyone under the age of 17 must never be left in charge of children, even briefly, and must never be counted within staff:child ratios.
14. A student or long-term volunteer aged 17 or over may be counted within staff:child ratios, at the level below their level of study, but only where all of the following apply:
 - The Manager is satisfied that they are suitable, competent, and responsible.
 - They hold a valid and current Paediatric First Aid qualification.
 - Their enhanced DBS and barred list check has been received and reviewed.
15. Supervising staff must brief the volunteer or student on the specific activity before it begins and remain within sight and hearing throughout.
16. Volunteers and students must not be responsible for administering medication, intimate care, or physical intervention with a child.
17. Volunteers and students must not use personal mobile phones or cameras in child areas, in line with the setting's Mobile Phone, Camera and Social Media Policy.
18. Any concern about a child's welfare observed by a volunteer or student must be reported immediately to the supervising member of staff and the DSL or Deputy DSL, following the setting's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
19. Any concern about the conduct of a volunteer or student must be reported immediately to the Manager and DSL, who will decide on appropriate next steps, which may include suspending or ending the placement with immediate effect.

4.5 Ending a placement

20. At the end of a placement, the supervising member of staff completes a short review with the Manager, covering conduct, reliability, and any concerns.
21. Building access, keys, fobs, and any nursery documentation issued to the volunteer or student must be returned or revoked on their final day.
22. The individual's record, including the outcome of checks and references, is retained in line with Section 5 of this policy.

23. Where a placement ends early due to a safeguarding or conduct concern, the DSL must consider whether a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service or a notification to Ofsted is required, in line with Sections 3.10 and 3.19 of the EYFS statutory framework.

5. Reporting and Recording

5.1 The Single Central Record

The Manager at each setting must maintain a single central record covering every volunteer and work experience student, alongside employed staff. The record must include:

- Full name, date of birth, and role or placement type.
- The date the enhanced DBS and barred list check was applied for and received, and the certificate reference number.
- Details of the reference obtained, including the referee's name, role, and organisation, and the date it was received.
- The date induction was completed and the name of the staff member who delivered it.
- Start and end dates of the placement.
- Where relevant, the Paediatric First Aid certificate expiry date, for any student or volunteer included in ratios.

The single central record must be kept securely, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR, and must be accessible to the Manager, DSL, and Ofsted on request.

5.2 Recording concerns and incidents

Any safeguarding concern involving, or reported by, a volunteer or work experience student must be recorded on the same incident or concern form used for staff, following the setting's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Records must include:

- The date, time, and location of the concern or incident.
- The names of those involved and any witnesses.
- A factual, signed, and dated account of what was observed or reported.
- The action taken and by whom.

Completed forms are stored in the child's confidential safeguarding file (where the concern relates to a specific child) or in the setting's central safeguarding log, held securely in the Manager's office and accessible only to the Manager, DSL, and Deputy DSL. Digital records are stored on the setting's password-protected management system.

Where an allegation of harm or abuse is made against a volunteer or student, the Manager must notify Ofsted, or the relevant Childminder Agency, as soon as reasonably practicable and in any event within 14 days, in line with paragraph 3.10 of the EYFS statutory framework. Where a volunteer or student is removed from the setting because they have harmed a child or put a child at risk of harm, the DSL must make a referral to the DBS.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Nursery Manager	• Holds overall accountability for compliance with this policy at their setting. • Authorises all volunteer and work experience placements before any offer is confirmed. • Ensures no individual begins a placement until vetting, including the enhanced DBS and barred list check, is complete.

	• Maintains the single central record of checks for every volunteer and student. • Reviews this policy at least annually and following any relevant change in legislation.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	• Leads on the safeguarding suitability of every volunteer and work experience student. • Advises the Manager on any information disclosed during vetting or referencing. • Ensures volunteers and students receive a safeguarding briefing before unsupervised contact could otherwise arise, and are never left unsupervised with children in any event. • Acts as the first point of contact for any safeguarding concern involving a volunteer or student. • Makes referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and notifies Ofsted where required.
Deputy DSL	• Deputises for the DSL in their absence, with the same authority in relation to volunteers and students. • Supports induction and day-to-day monitoring of placements.
Room Leaders / Supervising Staff	• Provide direct, constant supervision of any volunteer or student working in their room. • Never leave a volunteer or student alone with a child or children. • Report any concerns about a volunteer's or student's conduct to the DSL immediately. • Model safe practice and support the volunteer's or student's understanding of the nursery's policies.
Volunteers and Work Experience Students	• Complete all pre-placement paperwork honestly and promptly, including disclosure of any arrest, charge, caution or conviction that may affect suitability. • Attend induction before starting and follow the instructions of supervising staff at all times. • Never have sole or unsupervised responsibility for a child. • Report any concern about a child's welfare to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay. • Maintain confidentiality regarding children, families, and staff.
Parents and Carers	• Are informed, through this policy and the setting's induction information, that volunteers and students may support the nursery, always under direct supervision. • May raise any question or concern about a volunteer or work experience placement with the Manager or DSL at any time. • Are notified in advance where a volunteer or student is a regular, named presence in their child's room.

7. Related Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff:Child Ratios and Supervision Policy

- Mobile Phone, Camera and Social Media Policy
- Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

8. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed at least annually by the Nursery Manager and DSL, and without delay following any change to the EYFS statutory framework, related legislation, or Ofsted guidance, or following any incident that highlights a need for review.

This policy was shared with parents and carers via [method, e.g. parent handbook / setting website] and is available on request from any Little Acorns Montessori setting.

Policy reviewed and approved by: Jonathan Duffy, Director, September 2026