

The Nest at Thames Ditton Infants

- A specialist EYFS/KS1 autism provision “Developing communication, engagement, independence and confidence through a relational, communication-first curriculum.”



Our Vision

Every child in The Nest is entitled to:

- feel safe, understood and valued
- develop meaningful communication
- build positive relationships
- experience success as a learner
- access an ambitious curriculum matched to their developmental profile
- develop independence and self-advocacy

The Nest provides a highly specialist, nurturing and aspirational environment where pupils can thrive socially, emotionally and academically.

Understanding Our Cohort

- autism
- significant communication and language needs
- sensory processing differences
- differing cognitive profiles
- social interaction differences
- varying levels of emotional regulation and independence

Pupils enter The Nest at very different developmental starting points.

Some Reception pupils are accessing Reception-level learning with support.
Some Year 1 pupils are currently accessing learning developmentally aligned with nursery-age expectations.

Why Two Pathways?

To ensure all pupils experience both nurture and ambition, The Nest curriculum is structured around two interconnected pathways:

Foundational/Nurture Pathway

For pupils requiring intensive support with:

- engagement
- regulation
- communication foundations
- play development
- sensory processing
- early cognition

Aspirational Pathway

For pupils ready to access:

- broader academic learning
- increased symbolic understanding
- early literacy and mathematics
- greater independence
- more complex social communication

Both pathways remain:
communication-first, autism-informed, highly relational, sensory-aware

Ambition in The Nest does not mean all pupils follow the same pathway.

Ambition means: the right support, the right level of challenge, the right developmental next steps, meaningful preparation for each child's future.

Inclusion and Mainstream Access

The Nest curriculum is personalised and flexible. For some pupils, this includes supported access to mainstream classes and wider school experiences.

Access is personalised according to individual developmental and emotional needs.

Some pupils access:

- specific mainstream lessons
- playtimes and social opportunities
- assemblies and wider school events
- continuous provision opportunities
- targeted curriculum subjects

Support is carefully scaffolded to ensure pupils experience success while maintaining emotional safety and regulation. Mainstream access is viewed as part of an individualised pathway rather than a one-size-fits-all expectation.



What Makes Our Curriculum Specialist?

Our curriculum prioritises:

- Communication and interaction
- Emotional regulation
- Engagement
- Independence
- Play and exploration
- Experiential learning
- Repetition and overlearning

Teaching approaches include:

- Total communication
- AAC and visuals
- Structured routines
- Sensory integration opportunities
- Modelling and co-regulation
- Continuous provision
- Real-life learning experiences

Communication First

Communication is embedded throughout the entire day.

Pupils access:

- Spoken language
- Visuals
- Symbols
- Makaton
- Gesture
- AAC systems

Adults consistently model:

- Requesting
- Commenting
- Choice-making
- Turn-taking
- Emotion language



The Foundational/Nurture Pathway

Key priorities:

- Regulation
- Joint attention
- Engagement
- Sensory exploration
- Early play skills
- Cause and effect
- Functional communication
- Emotional safety

Progress may include:

- tolerating shared attention
- using symbols to request
- engaging in turn-taking
- participating in sensory play
- transitioning successfully

The Aspirational Pathway

Key priorities:

- Early literacy
- Symbolic understanding
- Vocabulary development
- Mathematical concepts
- Independence
- Peer interaction
- Problem solving

Progress may include:

- Retelling stories
- Applying phonics
- Writing with meaning
- Solving practical maths problems
- Engaging in cooperative learning

Learning Through Experience

Learning is:

- sensory
- practical
- meaningful
- repeated
- embedded in real contexts

Examples:

Planting seeds, cooking, local visits, role play, small world play, outdoor learning

Experiential learning supports:

- language comprehension
- concept development
- memory and recall
- generalisation of skills

Assessment and Progress

Assessment is:

- developmental
- individualised
- observational
- linked to EHCP outcomes
- recorded and tracked on Connecting Steps

We assess progress through:

- engagement
- communication
- regulation
- independence
- interaction
- generalisation

Progress for pupils in The Nest is often non-linear but transformational.

Evidence of Impact

Pupils in The Nest increasingly:

- communicate intentionally
- regulate more effectively
- engage for longer periods
- develop relationships
- access group learning
- tolerate challenge
- become more independent

Partnership Working

Strong outcomes are achieved through collaboration with:

- families
- speech and language therapists
- occupational therapists
- Freemantles ASD outreach team
- Local authority case officers.

Families are central to understanding pupils' needs and celebrating progress, which is why Evisense is so important as a tool to share children's achievements on a daily/weekly basis.

Our Longer Term Vision

As The Nest develops into two distinct pathways, our aim is to:

- maintain nurture alongside ambition
- provide increasingly personalised learning journeys
- ensure appropriate challenge for all pupils
- further strengthen communication outcomes
- prepare pupils for successful next stages of education and life, where possible within mainstream school provision.

“The right curriculum for each child, at the right developmental stage.”