

ELAN Physical Development (Gross Motor Skills) Curriculum Map for Reception

Educational Programme: Physical Development

Physical activity is vital in children's all-round development, enabling them to pursue **happy, healthy and active lives**. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child's **strength, co-ordination and positional awareness** through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and educators. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, educators can support children to develop their **core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility**. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye co-ordination which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practise of using small tools, with feedback and support from educators, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

Early Learning Goal: Gross Motor Skills

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.

Our Intent at ELAN Multi-Academy Trust

Our physical development curriculum builds progressively from the fundamental movement experiences developed in the earlier years. Children will be supported to refine their strength, coordination, balance, spatial and body awareness, agility and control, and to apply these skills with increasing confidence and independence.

Children will have opportunities to develop and apply these skills through running, jumping, hopping, skipping, climbing, throwing, catching, kicking, riding, dancing and a wide range of indoor and outdoor movement experiences. They will develop their ability to move in different ways, use both sides of their body together, judge space, negotiate obstacles, adapt their movements and respond to changes in the environment. As children become more physically confident, they will be encouraged to combine movements, sustain physical activity, plan and solve movement challenges, and apply their skills in increasingly complex situations.

We recognise that children's physical development is supported by early sensory and movement experiences. Our curriculum provides regular opportunities for children to access outdoor spaces where they can explore, test, repeat and revisit movements, developing confidence, control and an understanding of what their bodies can do. Through varied movement experiences, children develop awareness of their bodies and their environment, including the role of the vestibular system in movement and balance, proprioception in body awareness and force, and interoception in noticing signals from within the body. These sensory foundations contribute to how children move, feel, relate to their environment and learn alongside others.

We recognise that gross and fine motor development are closely connected. Opportunities to develop whole-body strength, stability and coordination provide important foundations for the increasingly refined movements children need for everyday tasks such as using tools, dressing and writing. Activities that involve both sides of the body working together can also support coordination, including cycling, crawling, star jumps and bat-and-ball games. Developing stability and control through the core, shoulders and arms also supports the increasingly refined movements of the elbow, wrist, hands and fingers needed for fine motor activities.

Further guidance and resources

- Sport New Zealand, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, throwing, catching and kicking, for further guidance and activities (saved in Microsoft Teams Folder).
- KIDDO to support understanding of how to teach children to skip (<https://kiddo.edu.au/school/skills/skipping>).
- Development Matters for any further guidance needed for specific cohort learning and development needs (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64e6002a20ae890014f26cbc/DfE_Development_Matters_Report_Sep2023.pdf).
- NHS Children's Occupational Therapy: Gross Motor Skills – for further guidance and ideas to support children's whole-body movement, strength, balance, coordination and physical development <https://nhsforhvalley.com/health-services/az-of-services/childrens-services/childrens-occupational-therapy/>
- Movement Matters: <https://www.earlymovers.org.uk/movement-matters>

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Ofsted: State-funded school inspection toolkit, for use from 7 September 2026, page 54

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children to learn. In the early years, it includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that educators provide, and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as how they take account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how they use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress.

Progression from 2-year-old and pre-school provision

The Reception curriculum is intended to build on, rather than repeat, the physical experiences offered in 2-year-old and pre-school provision. Earlier provision establishes fundamental movement patterns and confidence, including walking, running, jumping, hopping, climbing, throwing, catching, kicking and riding. In Reception, children increasingly refine these skills, sustain them for longer, combine movements, adapt them to changing conditions and apply them independently in games, challenges and everyday experiences.

- Develop and refine rather than simply introduce movement skills.
- Increase control, accuracy, fluency, strength and stamina.
- Combine two or more movement skills.
- Adapt movement to speed, direction, distance, height, surface, equipment and other people.
- Plan and solve movement challenges with increasing independence.
- Apply physical skills safely within games, routines, imaginative play and the wider environment.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their sensory foundations through varied movement experiences, exploring different positions, surfaces, spaces and equipment.
- Recognise that children's early sensory and movement experiences can influence how they move, respond to their environment, feel and learn alongside others.

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Physical development language: what do we mean?

The following terms are used throughout the progression. They are not additional curriculum areas. They are words we use to describe different parts of children's physical development. The explanations below are intended to help all educators to understand what these terms mean in everyday practice.

Term	Meaning in practice
Muscle tone and strength	Muscle tone is the level of tension in muscles that helps the body maintain a position and prepare for movement. Muscle strength is the ability to use muscles to produce force. For example, when pushing, pulling, climbing or carrying.
Core stability and postural control	Being able to keep the body steady and maintain or adjust a position when sitting, standing or moving. This helps children control their bodies while using their arms and legs.
Balance	Being able to keep the body steady when still or moving, and adjust the body when the surface, direction or activity changes.
Sensory foundations	The early sensory and movement experiences that help children become aware of their bodies, respond to their surroundings and develop confidence and control in movement.
Proprioception	The sense that helps us know where our body parts are and how much force to use. For example, knowing how hard to push, pull, carry or throw something.
Interoception	Noticing signals from inside the body, such as breathing, a fast heartbeat, feeling hot or cold, thirst, hunger or needing the toilet.
Sensory processing	How the brain receives, organises and responds to information from the senses and the body. This can affect how a child responds to movement, touch, sound, space and everyday experiences.
Vestibular system	The sensory system in the inner ear that helps us understand movement and the position of our head and supports balance. Movement experiences such as rocking, turning, climbing and changing direction provide opportunities to experience and practise movement and balance.
Joint stability	Being able to control and support the body's joints, such as the shoulders, hips and knees, during movement. Climbing, crawling, pushing and pulling provide opportunities to develop strength and control around the joints.
Motor planning	Working out what movement is needed, organising the movements and carrying them out. For example, deciding how to get through an obstacle course.
Coordination	Using different parts of the body together smoothly and purposefully. For example, coordinating the arms and legs when running, or the hands and eyes when catching a ball.
Bilateral integration	Using both sides of the body together in a coordinated way. For example, using both legs to pedal a bicycle, coordinating the arms and legs when crawling, or using both sides of the body during star jumps.
Crossing the midline	Reaching across the imaginary line down the middle of the body, for example using the right hand to reach for something on the left side.
Spatial and body awareness	Knowing where your body is in relation to people, objects and the space around you, and adjusting your movements to move safely around, over, under or through things.
Primitive reflexes	Automatic movement responses present in early development. These usually change as a child grows and develops. If there are concerns about a child's movement or development, practitioners should follow the setting's usual processes for seeking appropriate advice rather than trying to assess reflexes themselves.

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Grading and adapting activities

Activities should be adapted to provide the right level of challenge for each child. Educators can change the equipment, space, position, distance or level of difficulty so that children can experience success and gradually develop their skills. For example, a larger or lighter ball may be used before a smaller ball, an obstacle may be made lower or simpler, or additional support may be provided before a child attempts a movement independently. For riding, this could include creating a course with cones for children to navigate or providing planks of varying widths for children to ride or balance on.

Children should have opportunities to watch, try, repeat and practise movements. Educators can demonstrate and model activities, then gradually increase the challenge. Children should also be encouraged to choose equipment, plan routes and create their own movement challenges.

Educators should provide an appropriate level of challenge, supporting children to assess risk, make choices and develop confidence in managing physical challenges safely.

Supporting every child to participate

Every child should have opportunities to take part, experience success and develop their physical skills. Educators can adapt the activity, equipment, environment or role to help children participate in a way that suits their strengths and needs.

This might include using a buddy to help carry equipment, offering a different role such as timekeeper or scorekeeper, providing an alternative activity or adjusting the level of challenge. Educators should notice what children can do, build on their strengths and interests, and be aware that some children may tire more easily than others.

Spaces should be safe, supportive, adaptable and inclusive, creating nurturing environments where all children can participate, explore movement and experience success in ways that reflect their individual strengths and needs.

Movement throughout the day: across the provision

Gross motor development should be considered across the whole provision and throughout the day, not only during planned outdoor physical activity. Large movement patterns involve the whole body and develop progressively from early experiences such as rolling and crawling towards increasingly complex movements such as running, jumping, hopping, cycling, riding and participation in games and sport. Educators should provide regular opportunities for children to develop and apply these skills through everyday provision.

Provide regular access to outdoor spaces where children can explore, test and revisit movement experiences over time. Allow children time to repeat, adapt and develop their movements through play, exploring different speeds, surfaces, spaces and levels.

This can include opportunities to:

- Move in different ways and at different speeds, including opportunities for children to move freely throughout the day.
- Balance, climb, crawl, creep, slither, jump and travel over, under and around objects.
- Practise movement across different spaces, surfaces and levels, such as grass, slopes, stepping stones and other uneven or changing surfaces, where appropriate and safely supervised.
- Push, pull, carry and transport appropriate resources, helping children develop body awareness and understand how much force to use.
- Provide opportunities to stand or kneel rather than always sit during practical activities such as playdough, painting, designing and making.
- Consider whether tables, surfaces and equipment are at an appropriate height for the activity and allow the child to use a comfortable and effective position.
- Encourage a range of seated positions when working on the floor, alongside opportunities to change position and move.
- Use standing positions during singing, movement and action songs.
- Use practical tasks such as sweeping, brushing, washing, vacuuming, digging, gardening and helping to tidy as purposeful whole-body movement experiences.
- Provide opportunities for large-scale painting using rollers and brushes, including vertical surfaces where appropriate.
- Encourage children to move through and around the indoor environment safely.
- Use movement as part of imaginative play, routines and transitions.
- Develop strength and coordination through practical activities and active play.
- Provide opportunities for “core time” activities to develop core strength and control, for example activities where children lie on their tummy, hold and change positions, roll into a ball or practise simple ‘pose and hold’ activities.
- Provide opportunities to develop strength and joint stability through simple activities such as wall push-ups, push-ups against a chair or from the floor, and simple yoga poses such as cat and cow.
- Provide opportunities to cross the midline, for example by positioning objects so that children need to reach across the middle of their body to pick them up, move them or complete an activity.
- Make links with OPAL play at lunchtimes, recognising the opportunities it provides for children to develop whole-body movement, strength, balance, coordination and confidence through active play.
- Provide opportunities to use appropriate tools, such as screwdrivers, to develop hand, wrist and arm control.
- Combine movements and respond to changes in music, signals, equipment and other people.
- Adapt activities to make them easier or more challenging depending on the child's confidence and ability, supporting children to develop independence and confidence in managing physical challenges.

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PE Provision

Some schools may use a PE scheme that can support and complement this sequenced curriculum. Some schools also have access to a PE coach, providing additional opportunities for children to develop and apply their gross motor skills. Any PE provision should complement the progression outlined in this document.

Progression language for educators

When planning and discussing physical development, educators can use the language below to identify how children's skills are developing over time. The progression may move from developing a skill towards sustaining, combining, adapting and independently applying it.

- Develop – establish or refine the movement pattern.
- Sustain – maintain the movement with increasing control, stamina or fluency.
- Combine – link two or more movements together.
- Adapt – change the movement in response to equipment, space, speed, direction, distance or other people.
- Apply – use the skill purposefully within games, challenges, routines and play.
- Plan independently – choose, sequence and adapt movements or equipment to solve a movement challenge.

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Autumn

Area of development	Progression and experiences
Running	Develop enjoyment and confidence in running through a range of playful experiences and games. Develop efficient running by changing speed and direction, with increasing awareness of the space around them and other people. Respond to simple signals to start, stop or change direction, developing control and motor planning.
Jumping	Develop enjoyment and confidence in jumping through a range of playful experiences and games. Jump for height and distance, exploring different directions and body levels, including forwards, backwards, sideways, high and low. Explore different ways of jumping, including turning through different directions, and begin to control how and where they land.
Hopping	Develop enjoyment and confidence in hopping through playful movement experiences. Develop the ability to balance on either leg, including balancing on the right leg and left leg for up to 10 seconds. Begin to hop repeatedly on one leg, developing balance, coordination and control.
Skippping	Develop the coordination needed to move through marching, galloping and side-stepping towards skipping. Develop enjoyment and confidence in skipping through playful movement experiences. Explore rhythmic movement patterns, developing coordination, balance and control.
Climbing	Develop enjoyment and confidence in climbing through a range of playful movement experiences. Develop the ability to climb and land safely, using increasing control and awareness of the body. Provide a designated area with large, moveable equipment, such as crates, planks, tyres, ladders, benches and ropes, where children can create climbing opportunities and design simple obstacle courses. Explore climbing a ladder, climbing a rope up a slope, climbing a slide or sloping bench, climbing a set of steps and crawling through a tunnel.
Throwing and catching	Develop enjoyment and confidence in throwing and catching through a range of playful experiences and games. Develop the ability to throw underarm and overarm, exploring different heights and distances. Catch independently and with a partner and practise rolling and passing with increasing control. Use a range of equipment, such as beanbags, lightweight balls and scarves, to explore different ways of throwing and catching. Use simple throwing, catching and counting rhymes, for example, "Racing car number nine, losing gallons all the time. How many gallons did he lose?"
Kicking	Develop enjoyment and confidence in kicking through a range of playful movement experiences. Develop control when kicking and dribbling a ball. Kick a stationary ball towards a target, developing control over the direction and force of the kick. Use a range of lightweight equipment, such as foam balls, beach balls and balloons, to explore kicking and ball control.
Riding	Develop enjoyment and confidence when riding and moving on a range of equipment. Develop balance and control when riding or moving on wheeled and other movement equipment, beginning to change speed and direction. Explore a range of equipment, for example a trike, three-wheeled scooter, balance bike, taxi bike, space hopper, stilts, wobble board, tummy board, spinning top, Whizzy Dizzy and scooter boards. Use local parks and outdoor spaces to experience equipment such as a seesaw or swing, where appropriate and safely supervised. Develop awareness of the space around them and begin to navigate around simple obstacles.
Dancing	Develop enjoyment and confidence in moving to music through a range of dance and movement experiences. Explore different types of dance and copy and remember simple dance movements and sequences. Explore different body parts, levels and directions and hold a position with increasing control. Use movement breaks throughout the day to encourage children to move, for example Jump Start Jonny, Super Movers, Danny Go and Kidz Bop.

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Spring

Area of development	Progression and experiences
Running	Sustain running over increasing distances, developing stamina, strength and confidence. Run efficiently while evading and dodging, adapting speed and direction in response to other people and the environment. Plan where and how to move through increasingly complex spaces, developing motor planning and spatial awareness.
Jumping	Sustain jumping through a range of movements and challenges, developing strength, balance and control. Jump for height and distance, including over low obstacles and across stepping stones, with controlled take-off and landing. Jump over a moving rope and jump in time with music or a beat, coordinating both sides of the body.
Hopping	Sustain balancing on one leg for longer than 10 seconds, developing balance, strength and postural control. Hop for height and distance while maintaining balance and control. Hop over or onto low obstacles where appropriate, developing coordination and body awareness.
Skipping	Develop skipping for speed, distance and direction, maintaining rhythm and control. Vary the speed and direction of skipping and combine skipping with other movements. Develop coordination of the arms and legs as part of the skipping action.
Climbing	Sustain climbing through increasingly challenging movement experiences and develop the ability to land safely and effectively. Provide a designated area with large, moveable equipment, such as crates, planks, tyres, ladders, benches and ropes, where children can create climbing opportunities and design obstacle courses. Explore climbing a sloping bench at varying angles and climbing over a horse box. Climb up and down using alternate feet, developing balance, coordination and control.
Throwing and catching	Throw and catch at different distances, heights and speeds, developing control and coordination. Throw against a wall and catch the rebound, adjusting the force and direction of the throw. Use a range of equipment, such as tennis balls and lightweight balls, to develop throwing and catching skills.
Kicking	Kick towards a target, developing accuracy and control over different distances. Vary the distance and direction of the kick and begin to adjust the force used. Use a range of equipment, such as tennis balls, footballs and rugby balls, to develop kicking skills.
Riding	Ride increasingly challenging equipment while maintaining balance and changing speed and direction. Develop coordination when steering, looking where they are travelling and controlling their speed. Explore equipment such as a two-wheeled scooter, a scooter that splits in half, and a two-wheeled bicycle with pedals and stabilisers. Use a rope swing where appropriate, developing balance, coordination and confidence. Plan a simple route and negotiate obstacles with increasing independence and awareness of the space around them.
Dancing	Explore different types of dance and use music to encourage children to express themselves through movement. Use props such as ribbon sticks and hula hoops alongside sequences of dance movements to music. Create and sequence movements, making choices about the movements and props they use and explaining their choices. Change movements in response to rhythm and tempo, developing coordination and control.

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Summer

Area of development	Progression and experiences
Running	Develop quick starts from different positions, including standing and sitting starts. Run efficiently while changing pace, direction and pathway, responding quickly to signals and changes in the environment. Run as part of a group, changing pace and adapting movement while remaining aware of other people.
Jumping	Sequence different jumps and take off and land with increasing control. Jump along or over a long rope rhythmically, and jump for height and distance, including combining jumping with throwing and catching. Combine and sequence different jumps, adapting jumping to different spaces, surfaces and challenges
Hopping	Sustain hopping and hop for speed, distance and accuracy. Apply hopping skills in movement games and challenges, including hopscotch. Use a Skip-It or similar equipment to develop hopping control.
Skipping	Skip in time with music or a beat, developing rhythm and control. Use skipping ropes, coordinating the movement of the arms and legs. Develop the arm action needed for skipping with a rope, coordinating the hands, arms and legs. Use rhymes and songs such as “Skip to My Lou, My Darling” to support rhythm and enjoyment.
Climbing	Sustain climbing through increasingly complex movement challenges and develop the ability to land safely and effectively. Provide a designated area with large, moveable equipment, such as crates, planks, tyres, ladders, benches and ropes, where children can independently create climbing opportunities and design obstacle courses. Explore climbing a rope ladder, climbing ladders with different distances between the rungs, climbing trees and using a trapeze, where appropriate and safely supervised. Use local parks and other appropriate community facilities to experience equipment such as monkey bars or a climbing wall, where available and safely supervised.
Throwing and catching	Throw accurately towards stationary targets and develop the ability to throw at moving targets. Throw towards a moving target while dodging, adapting the force and direction of the throw. Apply throwing and catching skills through games such as ten-pin bowling, dodgeball, darts, table tennis and badminton. Introduce bats and balls, developing coordination, timing and control.
Kicking	Kick a moving ball with increasing accuracy and control. Pass and receive a ball while moving, adapting the direction and speed of movement. Apply kicking skills in games and movement challenges, responding to other people and the space around them.
Riding	Ride increasingly challenging wheeled equipment with control and increasing independence. Develop propulsion, steering and balance through a range of equipment and experiences. Explore equipment such as a two-wheeled bicycle with pedals, circle bike, unicycle, go-kart, push bike for two, pedal go, including standing up and moving along, skateboard, roller skates and pogo stick. Apply riding and movement skills safely in different environments, adapting movement to the space and other people and using bilateral integration and motor planning.
Dancing	Remember, sequence and perform a series of movements. Respond to changes in rhythm, tempo and music and combine different movements, levels and directions. Create, explain and perform their own movement sequences, making choices and adapting movements independently. Explore dance with props such as ribbon sticks and hula hoops and express themselves through movement, explaining their choices

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Physical Development Matters: observation checkpoints for birth to three years

- Around their third birthday, can the child climb confidently, catch a large ball and pedal a tricycle?
- Look out for children who find it difficult to sit comfortably on chairs **or on the floor**. They may need help to develop their core muscles. You can help them by encouraging them to scoot on sit-down trikes without pedals and jump on soft-play equipment.

Sensible and meaningful assessment

Assessment should be based on professional dialogue and observation across a range of contexts. Educators should consider not only whether a child can perform a movement, but how confidently, safely, efficiently and independently they apply it.

Review point	Ready to progress	Children who would benefit from further or different experiences Consider context and range of situations	What experience, adaptation or support will help them progress? End of term 5: What does the Year 1 teacher need to know?
End of Term 1	Percentage of children who are ready to progress:		
End of Term 3	Percentage of children who are ready to progress:		
End of Term 5	Percentage of children who are ready to progress:		

Children who would benefit from further or different experiences should be identified and supported through appropriately graded opportunities. Annotations may be added on this sheet, if necessary, or within other child progress documentation recorded by the school.