



**Guildford Nursery School  
and Family Centre**

**Where everyone can flourish**

**A guide to our ethos**

# Introduction to Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre

**At Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre, belonging and purpose are felt from the moment you arrive.** We genuinely care about the children in our care, their families, and about one another. Everything we do is driven by our belief that everyone should have the opportunity to flourish. Deep relationships built on trust, understanding and shared growth enable our team to be unwavering advocates for the children and families they serve, even when doing so requires courage and personal challenge.

**We prioritise the learning and development of all staff.** From recruitment and induction to ongoing professional development, our culture balances support and challenge so that everyone can thrive. Kindness, honesty and reflection are central to our work. High expectations are modelled consistently, and communication is open, straightforward and respectful. We recruit positive, collaborative individuals who are thoughtfully deployed and empowered to take responsibility for their own success and support others to achieve theirs. We celebrate successes and maintain a positive, “can do” outlook.

**Our practice responds to each child and family’s needs, strengths and individuality.** We meet people where they are and support them to make excellent progress from their starting points. We recognise and build on strengths, honour identity and experiences, celebrate differences, and actively challenge bias and prejudice. We continuously reflect on how well we create a sense of belonging for everyone.

**Froebelian principles inspire all we do,** ensuring that children, families and staff each receive what they need to flourish. We recognise autonomy, purpose and mastery as essential to motivation and wellbeing. Leaders provide appropriate autonomy, creating a natural energy and flow driven by shared purpose and a desire to keep improving. Visitors frequently comment that life is good here.

**We maintain a safe, responsibly managed environment,** meeting all legal, financial and health and safety standards. We strive to do the right thing for individuals—even when it is not the quickest, easiest or cheapest option.

**We are outward looking and committed to continuous improvement,** learning from best practice and forming meaningful connections that help us grow. Practice-led research supports professional learning, strengthens our provision and enables ongoing transformation, ensuring everyone continues to grow and flourish.



## Why do Froebelian principles sit at the heart of our work and inspire all we do?

**Since January 2017, I have had the honour and privilege of serving as Headteacher of Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre** - a role that brings immense joy and a deep responsibility to the children, families, staff and community we serve.

**Friedrich Froebel** is the perfect guide for our work. He championed the belief that a child's first seven years are the foundation of their entire education and life, holding a profound respect for every child, their family and the true value of childhood.

Froebel taught us to see each child within the context of their family and community. His principles remind me daily that positive relationships, built on trust and respect, are the heart of meaningful learning. We all need to feel we belong and be valued for who we are, just as we are. I firmly believe that **without significant relationships, there can be no significant learning.**

Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre has made a strong and enduring commitment to being Froebel-inspired. I am deeply grateful to, and proud of, our remarkable staff team whose enthusiasm, reflection and hard work bring Froebel's principles alive each day, supporting children and families to flourish.

**Sally Cave, Headteacher.**

## Who was Froebel?

**Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) was a pioneering German educator best known for creating the 'kindergarten.'** He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in early years education.

Froebel envisioned the kindergarten as a place where children could grow and learn at their own pace, supported by knowledgeable and nurturing adults. He saw children as active, curious and creative learners who make sense of the world through activity, play, talk and reflection. He believed that children flourish when they feel emotionally secure and when they are held within close, trusting relationships, both within their families and the wider community.

At a time when education tended to view children as passive recipients of knowledge, Froebel challenged this traditional approach. He argued for learning through activity, exploration and enquiry, ideas that were revolutionary in the 19th century and remain deeply influential today.

Froebel's vision was to **“educate people to be free, to think, to take action for themselves.”** His ideas continue to inspire early years practice across the world, shaping environments where children's natural curiosity, independence and creativity are honoured and supported.

# Froebel at Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre

We share Froebel's belief that children learn most deeply through play, self-initiated activity and meaningful communication and that every child should be supported to grow and develop at their own pace.

With guidance from Helen Tovey and the Froebel Trust, we have taken time to reflect on how Froebel's principles shape our practice across the Nursery School and the Family Centre. Their work has helped us consider how these values can be lived out day-to-day, ensuring that Froebelian principles inform our environment, our teaching, and the relationships we build with children and families.

Froebel's thinking guides not only our work with children and families, but also how we support and develop our staff, students and volunteers. By embedding these principles throughout the organisation, we ensure that everyone understands what we are striving for and why it matters.

Our shared vision and approach help us create an environment and pedagogy in which everyone can flourish.

As a team on this journey we owe gratitude to:

- **Stella Louis and fellow tutors for their inspiring teaching.**
- **Tina Bruce for her invaluable guidance and support.**
- **Sacha Powell and the team at the Froebel Trust for their support and trust.**
- **Chris Pascal and the team at CREC (Centre for Research in Early Childhood) for being exceptional research partners.**
- **Jane Whinnett for her loyal support and guidance.**



## Where everyone can flourish

OUR AIMS	OUR VISION	OUR COMMITMENT
<p>To inspire our children, parents, community and staff to be the best they can be</p>	<p>To inspire children to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptable and determined</li> <li>• Confident and curious</li> <li>• Well-mannered and collaborative</li> <li>• Independent and interdependent</li> <li>• Resilient and open-minded</li> <li>• Responsible and compassionate</li> <li>• Courageous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We work together with consent and respect.</li> <li>• We put the child at the centre of everything, recognising that they belong to a family within the wider community.</li> <li>• We communicate with everyone in ways that are respectful, reciprocal and mutually appropriate.</li> </ul> <p>We value connectedness and belonging meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every child is assigned a qualified key person</li> <li>• We work in close partnership with the community.</li> </ul>
<p>To encourage our children, parents and staff to love learning</p>	<p>To provide a curriculum that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exciting and innovative</li> <li>• Challenging and inclusive</li> <li>• Creative yet provocative</li> <li>• Ultimately motivating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We invest in staff training and development to ensure they are knowledgeable and nurturing.</li> <li>• We provide learning opportunities through self-activity and reflection.</li> <li>• We recognise the central importance of learning through communication, play and creativity.</li> <li>• Everyone is given freedom with guidance.</li> <li>• We encourage and enable all children to engage with nature.</li> <li>• We provide provocative and challenging resources.</li> <li>• We give learners time to gain proficiency.</li> <li>• We provide experiences and opportunities children find exciting.</li> </ul>
<p>To empower our children, parents and staff to make progress and achieve</p>	<p>To provide support that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children are and feel successful in their learning and development, ready for their next stage in life</li> <li>• Staff and children work and play in a culture that encourages enquiry, reflection, self-awareness and resilience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We start where the learner is.</li> <li>• We offer help and guidance early.</li> <li>• We constantly strive to improve.</li> <li>• We seek ways to empower others to increase resilience.</li> <li>• We recognise, welcome and respect diversity and difference.</li> <li>• We challenge prejudice and bias.</li> <li>• We support others to think for themselves, listening to and respecting their ideas.</li> <li>• We provide each learner with what they need now.</li> <li>• We support others to develop self-regulation.</li> <li>• We guide each child and adult to pursue and achieve their intentions, offering help when they need it.</li> </ul>



# Froebel in action at Guildford Nursery School

## Freedom with guidance:

*"Allowing uniqueness and individuality to flourish within a strong, supportive community." Balanced by: "Freedom can only operate within a framework of responsibility and respect for others, the resources and the natural environment."*<sup>3</sup>

- Children can move freely indoors and outdoors and between the two.
- Children are supported and guided to do challenging things for themselves such as using real tools in woodwork, climbing obstacles, and preparing their own food.
- Children are able to make their own choices from a range of options within a stimulating environment.
- Easily accessible and available resources are predominantly open-ended, made from natural materials, reusable and recycled, and always developmentally appropriate.
- Adults listen to, respect and respond appropriately to children's ideas and thoughts.
- Adults support children to consider and understand the consequences of their actions, their own feelings and the feelings of others.



## Unity, connectedness and community:

*"Learning should be connected to children's own lives and experienced as a meaningful whole so that children can connect new ideas to what they already know. 'Start where the child is' is a Froebelian maxim, which means begin with the child's own interests, experiences and understandings and build on these."*<sup>3</sup>

- Adults seek to build strong relationships in order for deep learning to happen.
- Adults make connections with children between what is known and what is new.
- Adults help children to see the connection between contrasts.
- We support and respect the relationship of every child with parents, family and their wider community.
- We actively seek to better know and understand each family and their individual context from initial home visits onwards.
- We ensure that children experience the different aspects of learning as a meaningful whole.
- Every interaction is the opportunity to connect.



## Engaging with nature:

*"The child should experience nature 'in all its aspects – form, energy, substance, sound and colour'."*<sup>1</sup>

- Adults support children to observe nature closely, marvelling in its beauty and treating it with respect.
- Adults demonstrate a joyful and curious approach to nature throughout each season and in all weathers.
- Children have opportunities to care for, observe and learn about the life cycles that are relevant to them.
- Children participate in gardening and know about the food cycle from seed to harvest to cooking and eating.
- Children are allowed and encouraged to climb trees, build dens, explore water, sand, mud, clay and more.
- Children have frequent opportunities to spend time in nature and the natural world.



## Learning through self-activity and reflection:

*"To learn a thing in life and through doing is much more developing, cultivating and strengthening than to learn it merely through the verbal communication of ideas."*<sup>4</sup>

- Children have regular opportunities to engage in cooking, weaving, sewing, woodworking, using clay, gardening, block play and construction.
- Adults allow children time and space so that they become proficient with materials and tools.
- Children are able to revisit activities.
- Adults help children to reflect on their development and learning by putting actions into words, asking a 'wondering' question, making a connection with a previous experience, narrating their play, working together to overcome challenges and finding solutions.
- Children deepen their learning through repetition, practice and challenge which is supported by adults.

## The central importance of play:

*"Play is the highest level of child development. It is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling. ...It... constitutes the source of all that can benefit the child... At this age play is never trivial; it is serious and deeply significant."*<sup>1</sup>

- Staff provide experiences which provoke curiosity, extend children's interests and open up new possibilities.
- Children are given plenty of time and space to play.
- Children are offered resources that are predominantly open-ended, made from natural materials, reusable and recycled; they are always developmentally appropriate and thoughtfully presented.
- Adults enrich the potential of play by being sensitive co-players.
- Parents are encouraged to value their children's play and to recognise its importance in their children's learning and development.



## Creativity and the power of symbols:

*"A Froebelian approach to creativity is about children representing their own ideas in their own way. As children gain experience and understanding of the symbolic potential of materials, ideas can be explored with increasing complexity. It is not about copying and assembling adult-designed artefacts or filling-in pre-drawn outlines."*<sup>3</sup>

- We offer many first-hand sensory experiences so children want to communicate and represent.
- Children have daily access to workshop areas to create and make, including paint, clay and woodwork.
- Children have the opportunity to play, to imagine, to take risks.
- We provide opportunities for children to make their inner worlds outer, to share their stories.
- Children have the freedom to make and create but with a growing understanding of the possibilities and limitations of materials and tools.
- Adults support and encourage offering guidance when needed.



## Knowledgeable and nurturing educators:

*"Educators should nurture and support children's growing potential as autonomous, thinking, feeling, creative learners. Relationships with children should be warm, respectful, interactive and intellectually engaging, not interfering or dominating. Educators should share in the joy and delight of finding out about the world."*<sup>3</sup>

- Staff enable and guide children's learning and development.
- Staff understand and teach the skills and knowledge children need.
- We recognise the inherent good in each child.
- Staff observe children carefully and respond to their interests.
- We start where each child is at that moment.
- We celebrate each child's achievements from their own individual starting points.
- Staff commit to reflective practice and further study.

# Froebel in action at Guildford Family Centre



## Freedom with guidance:

*"Freedom is not just about removing barriers, it requires opportunity and encouragement. The role of the adult is therefore essential in ensuring that all children's freedoms are protected."*<sup>3</sup>

- Parents are encouraged and empowered to ensure their children are able to make choices from a range of options.
- Staff listen to, respect and respond appropriately to children's ideas and thoughts.
- Staff support parents through the use of coaching skills to consider and understand the consequences of their actions and the feelings of others.
- Staff provide families with the right help at the right time in the right way.

## Unity, connectedness and community:

*Froebel placed great emphasis and importance on the role of the community and individuals being connected to the community.*

- Staff build respectful partnerships with parents.
- Parents are supported to find connections within their community.
- Staff engage the community in the Early Help offer.
- When supporting parents, staff begin where the family is, such as by involving parents directly in assessments like Outcome Star.
- Every interaction is the opportunity to connect.



## Engaging with nature:

*"Froebel saw the garden as a spiritual place of beauty, wonder and harmony where humans could be 'at one' with nature."*<sup>3</sup>

- Staff support parents to spend time in nature both for themselves and for their children.
- The Early Help offer utilises the outdoor space.
- Parenting courses emphasise the benefits of engaging with nature for children's learning and development.
- The Froebel-inspired community garden enables the community to engage with and in nature.

## Learning through self-activity and reflection:

*Froebel believed that we should become more aware of our own learning so that we can know something in a deeper, more reflective way.*<sup>3</sup>

- Staff support parents to reflect on their actions, to consider the consequences of their actions.
- Staff empower parents to wonder, to try out new ways of doing things.
- Staff help parents to see connections with previous experiences.



### The central importance of play:

*"For Froebel play was part of being human and of being fully alive."<sup>3</sup>*

- Parents are encouraged to value their children's play and to recognise its importance in their children's development and learning.
- Staff help parents to understand what the children might be showing and telling us through their play.
- Parents are supported to give their children first hand experiences such as cooking, going shopping, visiting the park together.
- Parents are shown how to play with their children and to know the benefits of playing together.

### Creativity and the power of symbols:

*Creativity enables humans to connect their inner world of feelings and ideas with their outer world of things and experiences and to reflect on them both.<sup>3</sup>*

- Staff ensure that parents and children have opportunities to represent their thoughts, feelings, concerns in their own ways.
- Staff support parents to understand their child's emotions and to help their children name their emotions.
- Staff support parents to understand their own wellbeing and emotional responses so parents are able to better understand their children.



### Knowledgeable and nurturing educators:

*Froebel believed that "through studying children, adults could gain a deeper understanding of their own lives as well as those of their children."<sup>3</sup>*

- Staff facilitate and guide parents' understanding of their children.
- We recognise the inherent good in each parent and use this as a starting point in building relationships.
- Staff listen carefully to parents and respond to their concerns.
- We start where each family is at that moment.
- We celebrate each family's achievements from their own individual starting points at the time of personal success.
- Staff commit to reflective practice and further study.



# Froebel in action for staff

## Freedom with guidance:

*"Freedom is not about just removing barriers, it requires opportunity and encouragement."*<sup>3</sup>

- We all have some autonomy within our roles, with guidance given where and when required.
- We are supported through the use of coaching skills to consider and understand the consequences of our actions and the feelings of others.

## Unity, connectedness and community:

*"The community is enriched by the diversity and uniqueness of individuals."*<sup>3</sup>

- We listen with respect and genuine interest.
- Every interaction is the opportunity to connect.
- We recognise and honour differences.
- We challenge prejudice and bias.
- We are consistently kind, honest and reflective.

## Engaging with nature:

*"Experience of nature is central to Froebelian practice."*<sup>3</sup>

- We observe nature closely in all weathers, marvelling in its beauty.
- We demonstrate a joyful and curious approach to nature.
- We seek ways to ensure Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre can become more ecologically sustainable.



## Learning through self-activity and reflection:

*"A seed of understanding if nourished with rich experience will grow over time."*<sup>3</sup>

- We wonder and ponder and reflect.
- We discuss and debate.
- We see mistakes as opportunities to learn.

## The central importance of play:

*"For Froebel play was part of being human and of being fully alive."*<sup>3</sup>

- We play.
- We try out new ideas.
- We adapt to support the needs of others.

## Creativity and the power of symbols:

*Creativity allows humans to connect their inner worlds of feelings and ideas and their outer world of things and experiences and to reflect on them both.*<sup>3</sup>

- We are supported to take responsibility for and understand our own wellbeing.
- We express our feelings and ideas in appropriate ways.

## Knowledgeable and nurturing educators:

*"I wanted to educate people to be free, to think, to take action for themselves."*<sup>1</sup>

- We start from where the learner is at that moment.
- We recognise the inherent good in each other and use this as a starting point in building relationships.
- We celebrate each other's achievements.
- We commit to reflective practice and further study.



If you would like to know more about us please get in touch. We welcome visitors. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram via our websites:

[www.guildfordnsc.surrey.sch.uk](http://www.guildfordnsc.surrey.sch.uk) | [www.familiesfirstguildford.com](http://www.familiesfirstguildford.com)

[www.thefroebelpartnership.co.uk](http://www.thefroebelpartnership.co.uk)

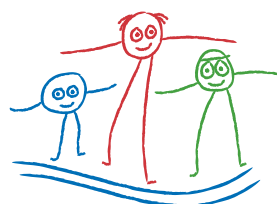
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- <sup>2</sup> Froebel Trust pamphlet *Froebel's Principles and Practice Today*.
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