

Understanding the World: The Natural World- Reception Curriculum Framework

Educational Purpose

We develop children's understanding of the natural world through first-hand exploration, close observation and repeated experiences over time. Children learn about plants and animals, growth and life cycles, seasonal and environmental change, and simple changes such as melting and freezing. They are supported to notice, describe and compare what they experience, building secure foundations for later scientific learning without turning Reception into a simplified Key Stage 1 Science curriculum.

Golden Threads

Living Things	Materials & Change	Seasons & Environments
Children develop knowledge of plants and animals through close observation, including how living things grow and change and how we can care for them.	Children explore familiar materials through first-hand experiences, noticing how they look, feel and sometimes change, including simple changes caused by warming and cooling.	Children observe the natural world over time, noticing seasonal change and developing the language and experience needed to compare familiar and contrasting natural environments.

Strand	Typical Starting Points	DP1	DP2	DP3	Statutory ELG
NATURAL WORLD KNOWLEDGE	• Enjoy exploring outdoors. • Notice things in the world around them. • Explore things using their senses. • Talk about things they see, hear, touch or find. • Notice when something changes.	• I know there are different plants and animals in the world around me. • I know plants and animals are living things that grow and change. • I know materials can look and feel different. • I know the weather changes and the world around me can look and feel different.	• I know plants and animals change as they grow. • I know living things need care to grow and stay healthy. • I know some materials change when we do things to them. • I know there are four seasons, and we can notice changes in the natural world as the seasons change.	• I know plants and animals have life cycles with stages of growth and change. • I know warming and cooling can cause some things to change, for example ice melting and water freezing. • I know seasonal changes happen across the year. • I know different environments can have different plants, animals and natural features.	The Natural World • Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants. • Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class. • Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.
NATURAL WORLD SKILLS		• I can explore the natural world using my senses and talk about what I notice. • I can look closely at plants, animals and materials. • I can notice when something changes.	• I can observe a plant, animal or familiar environment over time and talk about changes I notice. • I can explore what happens when I do something to a material. • I can notice and talk about similarities and differences.	• I can describe changes I have observed as a plant or animal grows. • I can talk about the stages of a familiar life cycle. • I can observe and describe what happens when something melts or freezes. • I can describe some seasonal changes I have observed. • I can compare the natural world around me with a different environment.	
ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY	No formal starting-point vocabulary: vocabulary is explicitly taught through the Reception curriculum.	plant – a living thing that grows animal – a living thing weather – what it is like outside, such as sunny, rainy or windy grow – to get bigger or develop	season – one of the four parts of the year: spring, summer, autumn or winter change – when something becomes different compare – to notice what is the same and what is different	life cycle – the stages a living thing goes through as it grows and changes melt / freeze – opposite changes between a solid and a liquid environment – the surroundings and natural features of a place	

Typical Starting Points describe possible prior experiences, not entry expectations. Scientific enquiry is woven through the framework through exploration, observation, comparison and talk rather than taught as a separate Reception strand.

Natural World Experiences Entitlement

The Natural World is developed through repeated first-hand experiences rather than six separate Science units. High-quality fiction and non-fiction should be selected to deepen understanding and complement first-hand experience; particular titles are not prescribed within this framework.

Half term	Anchor experience	Curriculum purpose
Autumn 1	Exploring our outdoor environment	Look closely at plants, animals and natural materials; use the senses; establish regular observation of familiar outdoor places.
Autumn 2	Autumn into winter	Notice changes outdoors and changing weather; revisit the same trees, plants and areas so children experience change over time.
Spring 1	Ice, water and change	Explore freezing and melting first-hand and describe what happens as things become warmer or colder.
Spring 2	Growing plants + animal encounter	Plant and care for seeds/plants; observe them over time and describe growth and change. Use the planned animal visit to observe animals closely and strengthen knowledge that animals are living things that grow, change and need care; sustained life-cycle learning continues into Summer 1.
Summer 1	A familiar animal life cycle	Observe a life cycle over time where possible and talk about its stages and changes.
Summer 2	Our environment and the beach	Use the beach visit to observe a contrasting natural environment and compare its natural features with the familiar environment around Westbury.

Year-round Entitlement

- Revisit familiar parts of the outdoor environment across all four seasons, observing and talking about what has changed and what has stayed the same.
- Have regular opportunities to explore natural and familiar materials through continuous provision, including water, sand, mud, dough, clay and natural objects.
- Have regular opportunities to draw plants and animals from direct observation.
- Encounter appropriate fiction and non-fiction about plants, animals and environments to deepen first-hand learning and widen experience.
- Use photographs and other appropriate sources where direct experience is not possible, while keeping first-hand observation central.

Assessment

Assessment should arise through children's exploration, talk, observations, drawings and representations, responses to texts and first-hand experiences rather than through isolated Science tasks or tests.

Practitioners should notice increasing ability to:

- look closely at and describe observations of plants, animals, materials and the natural environment;
- recognise and describe growth and change over time;
- talk about the stages of a familiar life cycle;
- notice and describe seasonal changes across the year;
- describe melting and freezing through first-hand experience;
- identify and talk about similarities and differences between familiar and contrasting natural environments.

Assessment should remain anchored to The Natural World ELG and the knowledge and skills deliberately selected in this framework. Reception children do not need to demonstrate the full range of formal Working Scientifically skills expected later in KS1.

Transition into KS1 Science

Reception provides secure foundations through first-hand exploration, close observation, growth and life-cycle experiences, seasonal observation, simple material change and environmental comparison. KS1 then develops more formal scientific knowledge and enquiry, including animal classification, habitats and food chains, plant structures and growing conditions, object/material distinctions and material properties, suitability of materials, simple tests, classification, prediction, and gathering and recording data.