Babies and children develop in **individual ways** and at **varying rates. Every area of development** – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional, is equally important.

**Child development**

- Every child is a unique individual with their own characteristics and temperament.
- Development is a continuous, complex interaction of environmental and genetic factors in which the body, brain and behaviour become more complex.
- Babies and children mature at different rates and at different times in their lives.
- Babies and children are vulnerable and become resilient and confident if they have support from others.
- Early relationships strongly influence how children develop and having close relationships with carers is very important.

**A skilful communicator**

- Babies are especially interested in other people and in communicating with them using eye contact, crying, cooing and gurgling to have ‘conversations’.
- Babies and children are sociable and curious, and they explore the world through relationships with others and through all their senses.
- Babies and children develop their competence in communicating through having frequent, enjoyable interactions with other people, in contexts that they understand.
- Children learn to communicate in many ways, not just by talking, but also in non-verbal ways such as gestures, facial expressions and gaze direction, in drawing, writing and singing, and through dance, music and drama.

**A competent learner**

- Babies come into the world ready to learn and are especially tuned to learn from other people and the cultural and material environment.
- Play and other imaginative and creative activities help children to make sense of their experience and ‘transform’ their knowledge, fostering cognitive development.
- Language, thinking and learning are interlinked; they depend on and promote each other’s development.
- What children can do is the starting point for learning.
- Children learn better by doing, and by doing things with other people who are more competent, rather than just by being told.
Effective practice

- Understand the processes involved in babies’ and children’s growth, development and learning.
- Support babies and children to develop a positive sense of their own identity and culture, this helps them to develop a positive self-image.
- Encourage, listen and respond to babies’ and children’s communications, both non-verbal and verbal.
- Acknowledge the different ways in which babies and children learn, and be aware that learning is a process that cannot be rushed.
- Recognise that babies’ and children’s attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others.

Challenges and dilemmas

- How to meet the differing and competing needs of every child, while being ‘fair’ about time spent with individual children.
- Listening carefully and waiting for a child who gets excited or pauses a lot when they are trying to communicate, so that they can complete what they wanted to say.
- Recognising and praising effort as well as achievement so that all children develop positive attitudes to themselves as learners.

Reflecting on practice

Think about each child in the group. Consider their:
- unique development;
- individual interests;
- communication style;
- learning style.

How is each child’s individual development supported through all the experiences in the setting?

What do I do next?

- Welfare requirements are explained in full in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage booklet.
- Areas of Learning and Development including effective practice, planning and resourcing at different stages are detailed in the Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage booklet and on the CD-ROM.
- Early Support information is available on the CD-ROM under areas of Learning and Development.
- Research and resources are available on the CD-ROM.