

Oyster Bay Nursery

Ratios and Lone Working Policy

Date written: October 2026

Date of last update: October 2026

Date agreed and ratified by October 2026

Date of next full review: September 2027

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and/or following any lessons learnt and/or updates to national or local guidance and procedures.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Debra Hines
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead(s)	Grace Sidders Rachel Finch
Nominated Individual	Debra Hines
Nursery Manager	Grace Sidders

1. Policy statement

Oyster Bay Nursery is committed to providing a safe, secure and nurturing environment for every child. Appropriate staffing levels, staff qualifications, effective supervision and clear procedures for lone working are essential to protecting children's welfare.

The nursery will comply with the current Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers in England, alongside applicable safeguarding, health and safety and employment requirements.

Children's safety and individual needs will always take priority. Meeting the minimum statutory staff-to-child ratios does not automatically mean that staffing is sufficient for every situation.

2. Staff-to-child ratios

The nursery will maintain the required staff-to-child ratios throughout all operating hours, including arrival and collection times, mealtimes, sleep periods, outdoor play and transitions between rooms.

For a group-based nursery in England, the usual statutory minimum ratios are:

Age of children	Minimum ratio
Children under 2 years	1 member of staff to 3 children (1:3)
Children aged 2 years	1 member of staff to 5 children (1:5)
Children aged 3 years and over	1 member of staff to 8 children (1:8)
Children aged 3 years and over, where a person with QTS, EYTS or EYPS is working directly with the children	1 member of staff to 13 children (1:13), where the applicable EYFS conditions are met

These ratios are subject to the qualification requirements and other conditions in the current EYFS framework. The Nursery Manager must check that the staff being counted are eligible to count towards the relevant ratio.

Where children of different ages are cared for together, the manager will apply the relevant EYFS requirements to the circumstances and ensure that children remain adequately supervised.

3. Staff qualifications and suitability

The Nursery Manager will ensure that staffing arrangements meet the applicable EYFS requirements for qualifications, experience, paediatric first aid and suitability.

In particular:

- Staff will only be counted towards ratios where permitted under the applicable EYFS requirements.
- Required qualification levels for staff working with different age groups will be maintained.
- Staff under the age of 17 will not be counted in ratios and must be supervised at all times.
- Students, apprentices and volunteers will only be counted where the applicable requirements are met and the manager is satisfied that they are competent and responsible.
- Staff will not be given responsibilities beyond their competence, training or authorisation.

The Nursery Manager will maintain appropriate records of staff qualifications, training, suitability checks and deployment.

4. Staffing arrangements and supervision

The Nursery Manager is responsible for planning staffing levels and ensuring that enough suitable staff are available to meet the needs of all children.

Staff deployment will take account of:

- The number and ages of children attending.
- Children's individual care, medical, developmental and additional needs.
- Staff qualifications, experience and competence.
- The layout of the nursery and the activities taking place.
- Staff breaks, sickness, absence and emergencies.
- The need for additional support during busy periods and transitions.

Children must usually be within both sight and hearing of staff and always within sight or hearing, in accordance with the applicable EYFS requirements. Children must be within sight and hearing of a member of staff while eating.

If staffing falls below the required ratio, the manager must take immediate action to restore safe staffing. This may include redeploying suitable staff, arranging appropriate cover, temporarily combining or changing activities where safe, or contacting parents to arrange collection if necessary.

Children must not be left inadequately supervised while cover is arranged.

5. Staff breaks, opening and closing

Staff breaks must be organised so that required ratios and effective supervision are maintained at all times.

The manager will ensure that opening and closing arrangements are planned in advance, taking account of the number of children present and the risks associated with reduced staffing.

Staff must not leave the premises or their assigned group until an appropriate handover has taken place and sufficient cover is in position.

Where a member of staff needs to leave a room for toileting, first aid, an emergency or another reason, they must ensure that another suitable member of staff takes responsibility where required and that supervision and ratios remain compliant.

6. Lone working: definition

Lone working occurs when a member of staff carries out duties without another colleague nearby who can provide immediate assistance. This may include:

- Opening or closing the premises.
- Completing administrative or cleaning duties outside normal operating hours.
- Working in an isolated part of the building.
- Carrying out an authorised task when other staff are temporarily unavailable.
- An unexpected situation in which a staff member is left alone with children.

The nursery recognises that lone working can increase risks to staff and children. Lone working arrangements must be assessed, planned and authorised appropriately.

7. Lone working with children

Oyster Bay Nursery will avoid lone-working arrangements with children wherever reasonably practicable.

A staff member must not be left alone with children as a result of poor planning, avoidable staff shortages or a failure to arrange suitable cover.

Where an unexpected situation results in a staff member being temporarily alone with children, the staff member must:

- Ensure that children remain safe and appropriately supervised.
- Contact the Nursery Manager or Nominated Individual immediately.
- Request suitable assistance and cover without delay.

- Keep children within appropriate sight or hearing, as required by the EYFS.
- Follow the nursery's safeguarding, emergency and incident-reporting procedures.

Any temporary arrangement must be managed in accordance with the applicable EYFS requirements and the nursery's risk assessment. The nursery must not rely on lone working as a routine staffing arrangement where it would compromise children's safety, supervision or required staffing arrangements.

The Nursery Manager will review the circumstances, record the action taken where appropriate and put measures in place to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

8. Lone working outside childcare hours

Where staff work alone before the nursery opens, after it closes or when children are not present, the nursery will assess the risks and put proportionate safeguards in place.

These may include:

- Ensuring that the manager knows when lone work is taking place.
- Agreeing expected start and finish times.
- Providing a reliable means of communication.
- Ensuring safe access and exit from the premises.
- Maintaining appropriate building security and alarm arrangements.
- Avoiding hazardous tasks when assistance is unavailable.
- Establishing a procedure for checking that the staff member has finished safely.

Staff must report any unsafe conditions, security concerns or incidents to the Nursery Manager.

9. Risk assessments

The Nursery Manager will assess risks associated with staffing and lone working and review these assessments when circumstances change.

The assessment will consider the premises, tasks, staff experience, children's needs, access to help, communication arrangements and foreseeable emergencies.

Additional controls will be introduced where necessary. Staff must follow the agreed arrangements and report any concerns that could affect safety.

10. Emergencies during lone working

If an emergency occurs while a member of staff is working alone, they must prioritise the immediate safety of children and other individuals.

Staff must:

1. Call the emergency services where necessary.
2. Contact the Nursery Manager or Nominated Individual as soon as practicable.
3. Follow the nursery's emergency, safeguarding, first-aid and missing-child procedures, as applicable.
4. Ensure that children are not left unsupervised while assistance is sought.
5. Record the incident and report it in accordance with nursery procedures.

Where a staff member is unexpectedly left alone with children, they must not leave the children unattended in order to seek help. They should use the agreed communication arrangements to obtain assistance.

11. Safeguarding and professional conduct

All staff must maintain appropriate professional boundaries and follow the nursery's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Staff must never use lone working as an opportunity to bypass safeguarding procedures or work outside their authorised responsibilities.

Any allegation, concern or incident involving a child or member of staff must be reported promptly in line with the nursery's safeguarding procedures.

The nursery will respond appropriately to concerns about unsafe staffing, supervision or lone-working practices.

12. Staff responsibilities

All staff are responsible for:

- Knowing and following this policy.
- Maintaining appropriate supervision of children.
- Reporting staffing shortages or unsafe arrangements immediately.
- Following instructions about staff deployment and handovers.
- Not leaving children in the care of an unauthorised person.
- Reporting lone-working risks, incidents and near misses.
- Completing any required training and risk assessments.

The Nursery Manager is responsible for ensuring that staffing arrangements are reviewed, suitable cover is organised and concerns are addressed promptly.

13. Records and monitoring

The nursery will maintain appropriate records of attendance, staff deployment, staffing ratios, qualifications, risk assessments, incidents and any significant lone-working concerns.

The manager will monitor staffing arrangements to identify recurring issues and ensure that corrective action is taken when necessary.