Nursery Vocabulary Progression

Curriculum-aligned priority vocabulary. Words are introduced through explicit modelling and reinforced in stories, play, routines and adult interactions. They are not a checklist to test every child on every word.

Progression: understand and respond → use with adult modelling → use flexibly in meaningful contexts. Revisit earlier vocabulary throughout the year. Adapt with objects, pictures, gestures and alternative communication for children who need them.

Autumn 1 — Once Upon a Time... What Happens Next?

Curriculum links: Gingerbread Man and traditional tales; harvest and family talk; sensory exploration.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	Hello, goodbye, listen, talk, story, rhyme
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Friend, happy, sad, angry, worried, help
Physical Development	Walk, run, climb, pour, squeeze, roll
Literacy	Book, cover, page, picture, story, name
Mathematics	More, fewer, same, big, small, sort
Understanding the World	Family, home, autumn, harvest, farmer, crop
Expressive Arts & Design	Colour, paint, draw, sing, beat, pretend

Teaching opportunities: Gingerbread Man and traditional tales; harvest and family talk; sensory exploration. Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.

Autumn 2 — What Are We Celebrating?

Curriculum links: I'm Going to Eat This Ant!; minibeasts, celebrations and nativity; musical instruments.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	Question, answer, tell, describe, next, again
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Share, wait, turn, kind, gentle, together
Physical Development	Jump, hop, balance, fast, slow, stretch
Literacy	Character, beginning, end, rhyme, sound
Mathematics	Count, match, compare, full, empty, pattern
Understanding the World	Celebration, festival, Diwali, light, Christmas, stable
Expressive Arts & Design	Texture, rough, smooth, instrument, loud, quiet

Teaching opportunities: I'm Going to Eat This Ant!; minibeasts, celebrations and nativity; musical instruments. Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.

Spring 1 — Where Will Our Journey Take Us?

Curriculum links: The Naughty Bus; journeys, vehicles, small-world roads and maps.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	Where, who, journey, travel, explain, remember
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Rule, choose, confident, safe, cooperate, fair
Physical Development	Move, crawl, under, over, through, sequence
Literacy	Title, author, letter, first, last, retell
Mathematics	Position, beside, behind, in front, shape, repeat
Understanding the World	Vehicle, bus, train, road, map, passenger
Expressive Arts & Design	Mix, join, build, model, rhythm, city

Teaching opportunities: The Naughty Bus; journeys, vehicles, small-world roads and maps. Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.

Spring 2 — How can we look after God's wonderful world?

Curriculum links: The Journey Home; planting, caring for living things and Easter.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	Why, because, notice, change, describe, care
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Responsibility, feelings, different, agree, disagree, protect
Physical Development	Throw, catch, aim, kick, twist, control
Literacy	Syllable, rhyme, initial sound, label, mark
Mathematics	Measure, longer, shorter, heavy, light, order
Understanding the World	Seed, soil, root, stem, leaf, grow
Expressive Arts & Design	Plant, create, combine, model, melody, prop

Teaching opportunities: The Journey Home; planting, caring for living things and Easter. Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.

Summer 1 — What lies beneath the waves?

Curriculum links: The Whale Who Wanted More; ocean-themed stories, water and materials.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	Predict, discover, observe, compare, wonder, describe
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Brave, proud, worried, calm, solve, include
Physical Development	Lift, carry, push, pull, steady, grip
Literacy	Sound, letter, rhyme, beginning, label, message
Mathematics	Deep, shallow, capacity, compare, group, number
Understanding the World	Ocean, sea, fish, shell, fin, habitat
Expressive Arts & Design	Pattern, texture, print, collage, pitch, feeling

Teaching opportunities: The Whale Who Wanted More; ocean-themed stories, water and materials.

Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.

Summer 2 — What's on Our Plate?

Curriculum links: Supertato; food tasting, healthy choices, people who help us and transition.

Area of learning	Priority vocabulary (introduce / revisit)
Communication & Language	First, then, finally, reason, explain, retell
Personal, Social & Emotional Development	Independent, healthy, choice, resolve, respect, ready
Physical Development	Skip, balance, pedal, control, cut, fasten
Literacy	Sentence, word, name, list, story, rhyme
Mathematics	Total, equal, more, less, share, sequence
Understanding the World	Food, vegetable, fruit, healthy, life cycle, community
Expressive Arts & Design	Design, join, mix, perform, evaluate, improve

Teaching opportunities: Supertato; food tasting, healthy choices, people who help us and transition.

Model meanings, invite talk during play, and revisit the words in a later context.