

# The Early Years Foundation Stage in practice

by Liz Wilcock

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# Introduction

## Department for Education (DfE)

On 6 July 2010, Children's Minister Sarah Teather asked Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive of Action for Children, to carry out an independent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), to consider how this could be less bureaucratic and more focused on supporting children's early learning.

The review covered four main areas:

- scope of regulation – whether there should be one single framework for all early years providers
- | learning and development – looking at the latest evidence about children's development and what is needed to give them the best start at school
- | assessment – whether young children's development should be formally assessed, at a certain age, and what this should cover

- | welfare – the minimum standards to keep children safe and support their healthy development.

The review reported on 30 March 2011, with a view to implementing any changes from September 2012 onwards.

## So, what are the changes that we need to explore?

The Department for Education states that the reforms will:

- reduce paperwork and bureaucracy
- | strengthen partnerships between parents and professionals
- focus on the three prime areas of learning most essential for children's readiness for future learning and healthy development

- I simplify assessment at age five, and
- provide for early intervention where necessary, through the introduction of a progress check at age two.

There are changes to the welfare requirements too.

To emphasise the importance of safeguarding, the welfare requirements are now the

### **Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements**

In section 3 of the revised Statutory Guidance document, pages 13-29, there is detailed guidance on what must be done to ensure that all legal requirements can be met.

In short:

1. *Child protection*: the revised EYFS includes examples of adults' behaviour which might be signs of abuse and neglect. If they become aware of any such signs, staff should respond appropriately in order to safeguard children.
2. *The EYFS*: it now requires that safeguarding policies and procedures must cover the use of mobile phones and cameras in the setting.
3. *Suitable people*: the requirements for providers to check the suitability of managers have been simplified. From September 2012, providers will be responsible for obtaining criminal record disclosures on managers. Currently, Ofsted obtain these disclosures.
4. *Staff qualifications, training, support and skills*: a requirement has been introduced in relation to staff supervision. Providers must give staff opportunities for coaching and training, mutual support, teamwork, continuous improvement and confidential discussion of sensitive issues.
5. *The requirement for childminders*: to complete training in the EYFS. This has been strengthened; childminders will be required to complete the training before they register with Ofsted.
6. *Staff to child ratios*: there is a clarification of the circumstances in which there may be exceptions to the staff to child ratios for childminders caring for children of mixed ages.

## **Press notice: 30 March 2011, Department for Education**

'Dame Clare Tickell is today recommending that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is radically slimmed down to make it easier to understand, less burdensome and more focused on making sure children start school ready to learn.

Setting out her recommendations, Dame Clare says that while parents and early years professionals agree that the EYFS has had a positive impact on children's outcomes and helped to raise standards, in its current form there is far too much time spent filling in forms and not enough interacting with children. She says the EYFS needs to be simplified and made even more accessible for parents and practitioners.

Dame Clare Tickell said:

The earliest years in a child's life are absolutely critical. Next to a loving and stable home environment, high quality early years education is one of the most important factors in a child's development. It's clear that the current EYFS has helped to improve outcomes and is popular with parents and professionals who welcome a framework that lets them know how children are developing.

But it's far from perfect. The current EYFS is cumbersome, repetitive and unnecessarily bureaucratic. And it isn't doing enough to engage parents in their child's development or make sure children are starting school with the basic skills they need to be ready to learn.

My recommendations will help give those professionals more freedom and are designed to make the entire system work better for children, professionals and parents. I hope my review leads to a slimmer, more resilient EYFS, that makes sure every child has the best possible start in life'.



## Section Two: Supporting children in their learning

In the first section of this book, we looked at A Unique Child, Positive Relationships and Enabling Environments. In this section, we will explore the fourth theme of the EYFS – Learning and Development. Remember that the EYFS is not all about children’s learning – it is about the care provided for the children too, and the suitability of the people responsible for the care.

There have been some significant changes in the revised EYFS that we need to consider.

1. Firstly, we should remember that:

A Unique Child + Positive Relationships  
+ Enabling Environments = Learning and Development

What does this actually mean? When we effectively support each child in their learning, meet each child’s

needs, work closely with parents and carers, and provide a safe and stimulating environment, we are in a good position to help a child develop and progress. How can you provide support for children with additional needs in your setting? Think about each child and their individual needs.

### A Unique Child

‘Uniqueness’ is about understanding and addressing the needs of all children.

### Identifying disabled children in the setting

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which is now incorporated into The Equalities Act 2010, defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term

## Section Two: Supporting children in their learning

adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, affecting either:

- mobility
- | manual dexterity
- | physical co-ordination, continence
- | ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
- | speech
- | hearing or eyesight
- | memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand, and/or
- | perception of risk of physical danger.

### Positive Relationships

This is about integrated working with parents, health and social partners and linking with Early Support.

### Early Support

Early Support is a government programme to improve quality, consistency and coordination of services for young disabled children and their families. It is targeted at families with children under five, with additional support needs associated with disability or emerging special educational needs. The programme promotes partnership working with families which can be applied across the age range.

### Enabling Environments

This is about working together with partners to devise a planned approach to removing barriers, sharing and combining resources to give the child a positive start to development and education

### Statutory Requirements

All schools have duties under the Equalities Act 2010 to:

- not treat disabled children 'less favourably', and
- make reasonable adjustments for disabled children.

The duties also place similar obligations on all services and early years settings that are not schools (such as nurseries, children centres and pre-school provision, including playgroups and childminders).

The SEN Code of Practice (CoP) helps early education settings, schools and LAs meet their responsibilities for children with special educational needs.

## Learning and Development

This is about working with parents and LAs to ensure that plans are in place for continued access to learning and development on transition between settings.

### Ensuring that your setting meets the requirement

- be aware and understand who your disabled children are
- assess the impact of your provision for access to learning and development for disabled children in your setting
- | work with parents, health and social partners to support the child's development
- | set out a priority plan such as Early Years Action Plan and Action Plan Plus which tailors support for the disabled child
- ensure plans are in place for transition either to another setting or to Key Stage 1, working with parents, setting/school and the local authority.

### Engaging local authority support

- You may want to contact your local area SENCO or early years consultant to establish what training, support and resources are available.



## Section Two: Supporting children in their learning

- effective practitioners record the processes that children go through. This will help everyone to see how the children's thinking is developing. Both children and adults can then talk about the learning that has taken place.

### Sustained shared thinking:

This is about children being encouraged to make choices and to make decisions for themselves. Children need time and opportunities to think about things and develop their own ideas, supported by adults, who let children take the lead in their learning.

- in the most effective settings practitioners support and challenge children's thinking by getting involved in the thinking process with them
- sustained shared thinking involves the adult being aware of the children's interests and understandings and the adult and children working together to develop an idea or skill



- sustained shared thinking can only happen when there are responsive trusting relationships between adults and children
  - the adult shows genuine interest, offers encouragement, clarifies ideas and asks open questions. This supports and extends the children's thinking and helps children to make connections in learning.
3. The Characteristics of Effective Learning underpin the prime and specific areas of learning. Previously, 6 areas of learning were our focus, and the message was clear that all 6 were interrelated and of equal importance. The revised EYFS has 7 areas of learning, separated into 'prime' and 'specific' areas. You will see that 'literacy' has been separated from 'communication and language' and become the seventh area of learning.

## The prime areas are at the heart of each child's learning

From birth, babies begin to develop quickly in response to relationships and experiences. The prime areas continue to be at the core of learning throughout the EYFS – they run through and support learning in all other areas.

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development.** This is all about developing children's self confidence and self esteem, that is – how children feel about themselves. It is also about helping children to manage their feelings and their behaviour, and supporting children to make relationships with others and to understand others too
- **Communication and Language.** This is all about developing children's listening and attention skills, helping children's understanding of language and developing their speaking skills
- **Physical Development.** This is all about helping children to be able to move around and be able to handle things. It is also about helping children to understand about health and their own self care.

The specific areas of development grow out of the prime areas, and provide important contexts for learning. Specific areas include essential skills and knowledge for children to participate successfully in society.

## Section Two: Supporting children in their learning

- **Literacy.** This is all about encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write
- **Mathematics.** This is all about providing children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measures. It is ultimately about supporting children to solve problems, helping them to develop their mathematical language, and to recognise, create and describe patterns. Mathematical learning can be supported, for example, by offering children the opportunity to explore shape, size and pattern during block play. Mathematical understanding can also be explored during daily routine, such as when preparing the table for lunch
- **Understanding the World.** This is all about guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community
- **Expressive Arts and Design.** This is all about enabling children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities.

The prime and specific areas of learning support each other – it is not a case of the prime areas first and then the specific areas to follow. All 7 areas of learning are interrelated. On page 5 of the Development Matters document, you will see how the Characteristics of Effective Learning sit alongside the aspects associated with each area of learning. There has been a strong focus placed on the presentation of the revised EYFS – it has been written in clear, plain English.

#### 4. Areas of learning – Aspects – Early Learning Goals – The Characteristics of Effective Learning.

Let's use an example from the Development Matters document to understand how it all comes together – refer to pages 8 and 9 of the document.

**Title:** Personal, Social and Emotional (showing the area of learning and the associated aspect).

**Aspect:** Making Relationships.

Three theme headings – A Unique Child (observing what a child is learning), Positive Relationships (what adults could do) and Enabling Environments (what adults could provide).

Find the ages of the children you are currently working with. Look at the first column – this is your guide under A Unique Child as to what you could see/observe the children learning. Look at the second column – this is your guide under Positive Relationships as to what you could do for the children. Look at the third column – this is your guide to what you could provide to support children's learning. Consider how the children are learning as you observe them and include this in your observation. Refer to the Characteristics of Effective Learning to assist you. At the end of page 9, you will find (in bold print) the Early Learning Goal for this aspect.

### Early Learning Goal

*Children play co-operatively, taking turns with others. They take account of one another's ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children.*

So, let's look at some ways in which you can support children in their play – with a focus on child-initiated play.

The term 'child-initiated play' is used frequently in the EYFS, because this way of learning is essential for children to help them understand the world around them. Children need to experience a wide range of learning opportunities – they learn from watching others and imitating them, as well as by their own exploring and experimenting. When children make decisions about their learning, that is, by deciding what they want to do, where they want to do it and what they will need in terms of resources, they are in control. Give them time to experiment with their ideas, offering support when necessary to help them to move their ideas on. Encourage the children to talk about their ideas and plans, suggest ways in which they may improve their skills and praise them for their efforts.

Your role in child-initiated play is important – you should strike a balance between intervening/offering support

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a term defined in Section 39 of the British government's Childcare Act 2006. The EYFS comprises a set of Welfare Requirements and a set of Learning and Development Requirements, which must be followed by providers of care for children under five years old – the age of compulsory education in the United Kingdom. The Welfare and Learning and Development requirements are not specified in the act but in separate orders. Early years learning in EYFS. Early Years and Childcare Team. Cancelling early education funding and provider appeals. Standards for early years providers. The early years foundation stage sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The early years foundation stage is based on four important principles that should shape practice in early years settings in Barking and Dagenham. A unique child. Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self assured.