

Reforms set to boost early language outcomes and cut workload

Reception teachers will benefit from a cut in unnecessary paperwork giving them more time to support children's early development, the Department for Education has confirmed in its response to a consultation proposing reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

More than 2,000 early years professionals responded to the consultation about revised early learning goals – key measures teachers use to check children's development at the end of the Reception year – with a consistent view that they were clear and would contribute to a well-rounded assessment.

A focus on language and vocabulary development, as well as teaching numbers in maths, was welcomed – equipping children with important skills as they begin their school journey.

The Department for Education has also confirmed today, Wednesday 1 July, that disadvantaged and vulnerable pre-school aged children will receive additional support as they transition back into early education. Grants worth more than £1 million over six months will go to national early years voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations including National Children's Bureau, Early Years Alliance and Pacey.

Education Minister Nick Gibb said:

It is encouraging to see that many Reception teachers and early years staff welcome our plans to reduce time spent on unnecessary paperwork and help them spend more time interacting with pupils in the classroom. These reforms will strengthen the teaching practice and improve pupils' vocabulary and reading as they move into Year 1 and beyond.

We will be rolling out these improvements to the whole early years sector from September 2021 and will continue working closely with nurseries and schools so that these positive changes keep driving up the standard of early education across the country.

The VCS grants will be targeted at improving outcomes for children most at risk of falling behind by the age of five, and will increase the support for young children with special education needs.

The Department for Education has also confirmed the [Hungry Little Minds](#) website – an online tool for parents and carers that includes tips to support children aged 0 to five with their learning at home – will be zero-rated by the major mobile providers, meaning that parents won't use up their mobile

data allowance if they browse the site from their smartphone.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

Nurseries, childminders and pre-schools have remained open to many children throughout the pandemic, providing reassurance and continuity to the youngest children during an uncertain time. The early years of a child's education are crucial and it is vital now more than ever that we work with the sector and with parents to get children back on track.

That is why we are working with early years organisations as part of a wider effort to make sure no child falls behind, partnering with experts to help them catch up from any time missed in their formal education. We're also making it easier for parents, no matter their background or income level, to access online resources that help them to support their children's learning at home.

The reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage follow the Government's commitment to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) in response to the Primary Assessment consultation in September 2017.

Today's consultation response confirms that local authorities will no longer be required to externally moderate the EYFS Profile within schools when the measures become statutory from September 2021, reducing the burden on teachers to gather extensive evidence of a pupil's development and allowing them to spend more time interacting with pupils. It builds on pilot findings published last year, where teachers found changes largely positive, with feedback that it helped focus on stories, group work and discussion, inspiring pupils to be more imaginative and improving their language skills. The improvements also resulted in a reduction in paperwork which lead to a better focus on supporting their pupils' education.

Reception classes have been invited to bring in the EYFS reforms a year early if appropriate, marking a further step in cutting teacher workload and boosting early language development.

Professor Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, said:

The Chartered College of Teaching welcomes these reforms. It is vital that teachers and early years colleagues are free to spend the majority of their time focussing on leading learning rather than constantly tracking and monitoring progress for external moderation purposes.

Dr Julian Grenier, Headteacher at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's

Centre, said:

I think it's important for the sector to take hold of the opportunities these reforms offer us. Reducing the workload around the EYFS Profile will enable practitioners to focus their assessment work where it's most needed. That's for children in danger of falling behind the majority, and children who may have barriers to their learning.

This is an opportunity for schools to think about their early years curriculum, and what they want children to learn, experience and enjoy, rather than focusing on assessment data. The key to giving children better and more equal life-chances is to strengthen the profession in the early years. I hope that colleagues will seize this opportunity to put less emphasis on generating 'data' on more on developing a stronger and better-trained workforce.

Tiffnie Harris, primary specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, said:

We support this new approach to early learning because it will remove the administrative burden of external moderation and give our fantastic early years teachers more time to interact with children. Early years education is so important for future outcomes, and it is a key to narrowing the attainment gap between rich and poor. We very much welcome the focus on this vital phase.

Jan Dubiel, specialist in Early Childhood Education, said:

Recent events have been a stark reminder of how unpredictable the world can be. As educators and policy makers concerned with early years care and education, we have a duty to ensure that we are preparing children to be knowledgeable, skilled, resilient and creative to manage and succeed in the future that they will face.

We are all committed to providing the most effective and up to date provision for children that will ensure this. The review of the Statutory Educational Programmes, Early Learning Goals and EYFS Profile provides us with a timely opportunity to reflect on, update and refine key aspects of the EYFS.