Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) covers the education of children aged 0-5. Learn more about the early years foundation stage and how it supports development through the seven areas of learning and development.

What is the EYFS?

The statutory framework for the early years foundation stage sets the standards for the learning, development, and care of children from birth to 5 years. The guidance within the EYFS framework ensures that early years leaders, practitioners, teachers, teaching assistants, and childminders can effectively support and nurture the learning and development of children in their setting, from birth to five years of age.

Play and more importantly, learning through play, is an essential part of the early years foundation stage. As children move into the reception year, a greater emphasis is placed on learning skills that will support and prepare children for the learning expectations in year one.

All practitioners working in this stage of education must follow the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. In addition, some practitioners also find the Development Matters EYFS Guidance Document helpful. Although non-statutory, this document contains lots of information about the different stages of development and gives examples of how practitioners can support EYFS children with their learning.



When was the EYFS curriculum introduced?

The EYFS curriculum has been mandatory since 2008, and sets standards in learning and welfare for any provider caring for children aged from birth to 5. It was introduced in response to research that highlighted the role good quality childcare plays in supporting children's learning and development.

The idea was that the new framework would place a stronger focus on three prime areas of learning - communication and language, physical development, and personal, social, and emotional development - which are critical for the development of young children, and are fundamental to more structured learning as they get older.

The EYFS recognises that children need to be able to use concrete experiences to provide the building blocks for their learning. Based on this, the learning ethos behind the EYFS encourages learning through a mix of play-based and adult-led learning. Adults working in

early years support children's learning and development through methods, such as discussions, modelling, and direct and indirect teaching.

EYFS overarching principles

To gain more advanced knowledge of the EYFS, it is crucial to understand the four guiding principles that shape early years practice in EYFS settings. Understanding these EYFS principles enables practitioners to create an optimum learning environment in which children can continuously learn, develop and thrive.

The four guiding principles:

- Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- Importance of learning and development. Children develop and learn at different rates.

Early years setting definition

In EYFS, learning takes place in areas often referred to as learning environments.

Early years settings can include schools, childminders, day nurseries, pre-schools, holiday playschemes, and childcare in your own home. The law refers to these as early years settings and providers. Early years settings should be safe, engaging spaces that seek to enable children to feel comfortable.

What does the EYFS aim to provide?

The early years foundation stage seeks to provide:

- Quality and consistency across all early years schools & settings
- A secure foundation through learning opportunities tailored to the needs of pupils of this age group.
- Partnership working between parents and practitioners.
- Equality of opportunity to support children of all backgrounds.

The statutory framework for the early years foundation stage

It is crucial that those working with any of these early years settings are familiar with the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. This guidance sets out the required standards that early years practitioners need to follow.

A crucial aspect within the framework for the EYFS, is the section containing the recommendations for safeguarding and welfare. Safeguarding is a key part of the EYFS and

all those working within early years, including voluntary roles, need to be aware of the EYFS safeguarding measures.

Some of the areas of safeguarding and welfare within the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage include:

- child protection
- suitable people
- staff qualifications, training, support, and skills
- key person
- staff-child ratios
- health
- managing behaviour
- safety and suitability of premises, environment, and equipment
- special educational needs
- information and records

What are the EYFS seven areas of learning and development?

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)
- Communication and Language (C+L)
- Physical Development (PD)
- Literacy (L)
- Mathematics (M)
- Understanding the World (UTW)
- Expressive Arts and Design (EAD)

Personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, and physical development are the prime areas of learning and development in EYFS. These areas are important as they form the foundations upon which all further learning is built.

Literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design are the specific areas of learning and development in EYFS. It is through these areas that the prime areas are further applied and strengthened.

Each of these areas is as important as the other and all are interwoven. At the end of the reception year, children are assessed against the early learning goals (ELGs). The purpose of these assessments is to ascertain whether children have achieved the expected level of progress within each area of learning and development.



Characteristics of effective teaching and learning

A common misconception that occurs within EYFS is that children ‘just play’. Skilled practitioners are able to understand that play can lead to valuable learning. The characteristics of effective teaching and learning (CoETL) within the statutory framework allow practitioners to ensure that children gain the skills that underpin their learning and development across the prime and specific areas of learning. The CoETL also allow practitioners to ensure learning is tailored to each child by considering their own individual level of development when planning for learning.

The CoETL are:

Playing and exploring:

This represents how children engage as they investigate and experience new things firsthand.

Active learning:

This aspect represents how children stay motivated to keep on trying when they encounter difficulties, or how they enjoy personal achievements.

Creating and thinking critically:

This element represents the process of thinking behind children's learning, how they develop their own ideas, and how they create strategies to test these ideas.

Learning through play

Play in the Early Years Foundation Stage is essential to young children. Through play, children will learn and develop in all seven areas of EYFS. Children will be able to engage in creativity and team-building skills with solo and group play, all of which benefit their language development and social skills.

By practitioners supporting play-based activities both within the indoor learning areas and the outdoor environment, children will be given opportunities to explore new ideas, engage in problem-solving activities, and learn to be more independent.

EYFS and Ofsted

Learning typically looks a little different in early years compared with other stages of education. This is because young children learn best through play and when their learning is scaffolded by a knowledgeable adult. All early years settings that are registered with Ofsted will be subject to Ofsted inspections. Early years settings within a school will be subject to Ofsted inspections during a whole-school Ofsted inspection.

The Early Years Handbook for Ofsted-Registered Provision states that: '*Inspectors must not advocate a particular method of planning, teaching or assessment. They must not look for a preferred methodology but must record aspects of teaching and learning that they observe to be effective and identify what needs to improve*.' This is because Ofsted believe that the choice of teaching methods is a decision for each individual provider to undertake. Ofsted inspectors will want to understand how the provider structures the EYFS curriculum as a whole, based on the information and guidance contained in the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage.

Within the Ofsted Handbooks (for schools and settings) a clear Ofsted definition of teaching in EYFS has been provided:

'*Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress*.' This Ofsted definition of teaching in EYFS perfectly explains the ways in which practitioners support young children with their learning and development within early years settings.

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