



## **School Governors' thumbnail guide to the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) - November 2021**

**What are the top 4 things we need to know about the changes?** The current EYFS was in place from 2012 to 2021. The revised (2021) EYFS largely builds on the principles of the preceding framework. The following list shows 4 headline changes and the rationale behind them.

**1. More focus on curriculum.** The revised framework has longer 'educational programmes' for each of the 3 prime and 4 specific areas of learning. These are still brief. If we see them as the skeleton, then the school's job is to put the flesh on those bones. Schools can develop that curriculum by following the DfE's non-statutory curriculum guidance, *Development Matters*. There is no requirement in the statutory framework to create a lengthy curriculum plan, or to create skills progression maps. However, the guidance suggests that schools should have a 'top level view' and consider; What do you want children to experience, understand and be able to do, as a result of their time in the early years? School subject leads may need to learn about the EYFS from early years colleagues. Together, they can consider the 'vertical design' of the curriculum. What are the important, foundational skills and concepts children will be learning in the EYFS? These will need to be a continued focus for any children not yet secure as they move into Key Stage One. Appropriately flexible implementation of the National Curriculum is important. The school's early years curriculum will need to build on the strengths of the children, families and the local community. It will need to ensure that every child experiences an appropriate and ambitious early education.

**2. A greater emphasis on early communication.** Communication is foundational to all of children's learning and thinking. Good communicators can:

- Tell others how they are feeling.
- Express their thoughts and ideas
- Ask for help when needed
- They can make friends.
- They can solve problems through discussion and negotiation (rather than lashing out or becoming angry and withdrawn)
- Communication is at the heart of children's early reading and writing too.

**3. Reduce workload.** The revised EYFS urges practitioners to move away from excessive collection of 'assessment data'. Ofsted have also said that they will not look at 'in-year' data in the early years during inspection visits. The focus of an Ofsted inspection is the curriculum and how well it is implemented, not inspecting lots of data about progress.

**4. Tackle educational inequalities.** Currently, children eligible for free school meals are 4.6 months behind other children by the end of the EYFS. There are also significant inequalities for other groups of children, like those from Gypsy/Roma, Pakistani and Black Caribbean backgrounds. Children with SEND are, on average, 15 months behind other children. Analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation shows that, on average, gaps double by the end of the primary phase. They double again by the end of the secondary phase. But there is strong research evidence that high-quality early education is good for all children, and disproportionately good for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It reduces incidence of SEND. So, this is the key phase for schools to focus on, **to promote a bright future for every child**. Ofsted note that an excessive focus on the collection of progress data has an especially negative effect on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and children with SEND.

**What are the key differences in the Early Learning Goals?** The Early Learning Goals (ELGs) have been rewritten in a simpler form, to make them easier to assess. This is part of the focus on reducing workload. Teachers can assess the ELGs briskly, with care, in the first half of the summer term. Collecting 'evidence' for the ELGs should not be the main task of reception teachers. There is no longer an 'exceeding' level. This will reduce workload: there is no longer a second set of statements to assess children against. Overall, these changes mark two significant turns in the road. Firstly, putting assessment in its place: to check what children have learnt, and to check the impact of the curriculum. Assessment is no longer the main driver. Secondly, the revised EYFS puts more emphasis on children having secure early learning. This is similar to the 'maths mastery' approach. Where children are learning more quickly, teachers and early years educators can deepen their understanding rather than moving them onto new concepts and skills. They might explore more 'real world' problems through their understanding of number, for example.

**Why is there no goal for technology?** At the time of the 2012 framework, many children did not have access to technology at home. This is not the case anymore. Children have extensive access to mobile phones, tablets and other technology. It is more helpful to see technology as another medium for learning. Children are now 'digital natives'. They move with ease between the virtual and real world. A child might watch Bob the Builder on YouTube, and then play at being Bob or Wendy in the sandpit or with construction toys. Children might be fascinated by the ants they see outdoors. Next, they might observe them more closely with a magnifying app on a phone or tablet. Later, they might watch videos about ants online. Technology has become embedded into children's everyday lives and in the way they experience the curriculum.

**What will be different in Foundation Stage classrooms when governors visit schools?** In many schools, governors might notice that teachers and early years educators are more focussed on listening to children and having conversations with them. They might spend more time joining in with their play and guiding their learning. They might notice much less recording of what children do to collate 'evidence'. Do you judge your EYFS provision to be good or better? The revised EYFS will feel like evolution, not revolution. High-quality early years classrooms will already have a strong curriculum in place. There will already be appropriate teaching and care to help every child achieve. The revised EYFS encourages staff to use their professional judgement more. Staff can stop doing time-consuming work which doesn't improve children's learning. Does your EYFS need urgent improvement? The new Framework offers new opportunities and flexibilities. It allows staff to free up time to focus on the areas where your children need the most help, especially their communication.

Some of the ways that children in the early years learn are:

- through their self-chosen play
- through the careful structuring of the environment
- through interactions with adults
- through playful guided learning
- (especially towards the end of the EYFS phase) through direct teaching.

Governors may wish to consider asking:

Can you talk me through some/all of these? Can we see some/all in action?

**Will there be any changes in the data governors receive about children's attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage?** Governors will not receive data about how many children are 'exceeding'. The data will show how many children have met the different ELGs. It will tell you how many children have achieved a 'Good Level of Development'. The Early Years Foundation Stage sets out the foundational knowledge that every child needs to be a successful learner in Key Stage One. Governors will need to know that this data is not just used summatively: to show how well children are progressing, and the impact of the Early Years Curriculum. They will need to know that the assessment information is also used formatively. How are the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for Key Stage One implemented with appropriate flexibility, to make sure that every child is secure in their early learning?

**How can governors be confident about the accuracy of the profile data when there are no LA moderation visits or training?** In line with other changes to the school system in England, the focus is now for schools to make their own arrangements in this respect. Governors will want to know how the school moderates assessments to check they are accurate. Governors will want to ensure that staff have appropriate professional development in this, and other areas of the EYFS. We (the LA) will still be offering training and moderation activities to Reception teachers if they wish to attend.

**Can governors monitor the progress of various groups of children throughout the Foundation Stage? If so, how will they do this?** Recent school reforms, like Assessment without Levels, have shifted the focus away from the collection of lots of data with numerical 'levels'. The new *Development Matters* is consistent with this approach. It cannot be broken down into levels for tracking purposes. Instead, there is more focus on curriculum design: what do we want children to experience, know and be able to do? Formative assessment supports this. That's when teachers and early years educators are regularly checking how well children are progressing and offering extra help quickly when needed. Staff do not need to write down formative assessments as a matter of course. Governors will need to know that all groups of children are making sound progress, in line with the equality act. The reforms do not suggest that there should be no tracking of children's progress at all. Instead, tracking should be proportionate and robust. For example, are Year 4 children assessed in every aspect of the National Curriculum twice a term? If they are not, why would a governing body want to see twice-termly 'data drops' for the EYFS? Governors might want information on how many children are needing extra help to access the early years curriculum and how well that extra help is working? Are there overlaps between the children who need this extra help, and other characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, free school meals)? If there are, then how is the school tackling these potential inequalities, and how well are their strategies working? What do gaps look like at the end of the EYFS? Do they widen or narrow during Key Stages One and Two?

**What questions might Ofsted inspectors ask governors from September 2021 in the light of the changes in the EYFS?** Governors should always check the Ofsted Inspection Handbook. That way, you will get correct and up to date information. At the time of writing, the key paragraphs state that:

**320.** Inspectors should take account of all the judgements made across the evaluation schedule. In particular, they should consider:

- the extent to which leaders and staff plan, design and implement the curriculum
- the extent to which the curriculum and care practices meet the needs of the range of children who attend, particularly any children with SEND
- the progress all children make in their learning and development relative to their starting points and their readiness for the next stage of their education
- children's personal, social and emotional development, including whether they feel safe and are secure, stimulated and happy

**321.** Inspectors will particularly consider the intent, implementation, and impact of the school's early years curriculum. They will evaluate the impact that the quality of education has on children, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with SEND.

**Should we tell parents about the changes? What are the key points that parents need to know? Should we consult parents about any plans to change or introduce a new curriculum?** It is generally good practice to brief parents about changes. It is also helpful to explain to parents what approaches the school is taking (teaching and care). It may be helpful to outline why parents might notice a reduction in the amount of 'evidence' that is collected about their child's learning. Parents will want to know how the time this frees up will give teachers and early years educators more time to work directly with the children. It is generally good practice to involve all stakeholders, including parents, to an appropriate degree in the design and evaluation of the school's curriculum. The Department for Education's Hungry Little Minds website helps parents to support their child's early learning at home.

### **Where can governors find more information about the revised EYFS?**

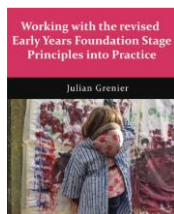
The DfE has put together online guidance for early years providers. This mostly focuses on the birth to four age range (not the reception year).

[Help for early years providers - Department for Education](#)

You can also download a free book, *Understanding the Revised Early Years Foundation Stage: Principles into Practice*. This is by Julian Grenier, who led on the rewrite of *Development Matters*.

### **Working with the revised Early Years Foundation Stage: Principles into Practice**

Free to download at <http://development-matters.org.uk>



Alongside the non-statutory *Development Matters*, schools may have chosen to use *Birth to 5 Matters* – an alternative non-statutory document that can be used by Teachers and Early Educators to support curriculum development and progression. This can also be downloaded for free.

[Birth To 5 Matters – Guidance by the sector, for the sector](#)



## Early Adopters briefing from the Foundation Stage Forum with Julian Grenier (DfE), Wendy Ratcliff HMI and Gill Jones HMI.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PyymbbZJa-I>



Julian Grenier, writes weekly for the Times Educational Supplement

<https://www.tes.com/author/julian-grenier>

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