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Guidance

The EYFS in schools

Updated 31 October 2022

Applies to England

Contents

[Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\)](#)

[Inspection practice](#)

[COVID-19 pandemic](#)



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We've split the questions up into groups for easy reading. They should be read alongside the [school inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook>).

Early years foundation stage (EYFS)

Does Ofsted expect schools to use the government's non-statutory guidance, 'Development matters', when developing and shaping their EYFS curriculum?

The EYFS's educational programmes provide the framework for the curriculum. It is up to schools to decide how to expand, extend and broaden these. It is for schools to decide what guidance they choose to use when developing and shaping their curriculums.

Ofsted inspects providers in line with the principles and requirements of the EYFS. Schools may find it helpful to use 'Development matters', but we do not inspect against this guidance.

Will Ofsted expect to see curriculum maps for every area of learning in the early years?

We are clear that what children learn in the early years is incredibly important for their future success; it is the foundation of children's learning. But it is for schools to decide how to talk about the early years curriculum with inspectors. Some schools may choose to map this out, but others may present what they do in a different way. Ofsted does not have a preferred view on how schools design their curriculum in early years.

Inspectors will want to understand how schools design the curriculum in early years to give children the foundational knowledge and understanding they will need for key stage 1 and for the rest of their schooling.

Our inspection handbooks for registered early years providers and for schools make it clear that curriculum planning does not need to be in any specific format. It is up to providers to determine the format of their planning, and it is up to leaders to justify these plans based on what they want children to encounter, explore and learn in school.

The curriculum in a primary school starts when children first join in the early years, be that the Nursery or Reception class. Inspectors will want to understand how the curriculum in early years is the foundation for key stage 1, as well as to understand how knowledge builds in a sequence from Nursery to Year 6.

Inspectors will want to understand how learning in key stage 1 and beyond builds on the curriculum in the early years.

Will Ofsted expect providers to show the progress of a child tracked against the revised non-statutory guidance, ‘Development matters’?

Ofsted does not ask to see any internal tracking or assessment information. Our school inspection handbook outlines how we will gather evidence during an inspection, through talking to leaders, teachers and children about what they are learning.

We know that early years practitioners are skilled at getting to know children and finding out what they know and can do. This is what is important. Whatever ‘system’ schools have in place for the assessment of young children should not take adults away from those important interactions.

As outlined in our handbook, inspectors do not expect to see documentation other than that set out in the EYFS framework. They will use the evidence gathered from discussions and observations to judge the overall quality of the curriculum provided for children.

How will inspectors consider progress?

Ofsted considers the curriculum as the progression model. By progress, we mean that children know more, remember more and are able to do more of what was intended in the curriculum, which are the EYFS learning and development requirements.

In early years, progress might mean:

- for example, knowing sounds of farm animals, knowing that an oven gets hot, knowing the meaning of countless words and knowing what facial expressions suggest
- ‘know how’ – for example, knowing how to hold a pair of scissors, knowing how to catch a ball, knowing that we should take turns and how to do so, knowing how to dress and undress a doll and knowing how to hold and turn the pages of a book
- knowing behaviours and habits for the future – for example, knowing to look at the teacher, knowing to listen when others speak and knowing that we sit and listen to stories
- for children in Reception, learning to write letter sounds and numbers

We can say that these have been learned when they are remembered.

Inspectors will want to see that the curriculum on offer sequences the knowledge that children need. They will look at what staff teach children, and whether children know and remember that curriculum.

Will Ofsted prefer to see paper assessments rather than those recorded electronically?

There is no prescribed way of carrying out or recording assessments, as long as assessment is effective and helps children's learning, development and progress.

We know that early years practitioners are skilled at getting to know children and finding out what they know and can do. This is what is important. Whatever 'system' schools have in place for the assessment of young children should not take adults away from those important interactions.

What impact have the EYFS reforms have on Ofsted inspections?

Ofsted inspects in line with the principles and requirements set out in the statutory EYFS framework, to evaluate the overall quality and standards of a school's early years provision. Ofsted inspections remain in line with the requirements set out in the new EYFS framework for all early years providers, including Reception Year in schools.

What are the changes to the early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP)?

On Tuesday 26 April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) wrote to schools to update them on the EYFSP, ahead of the pre-assessment period in schools.

Following the reforms to the EYFS, the following has been decided:

- the EYFS profile will no longer be included in the DfE's Analyse School Performance
- the EYFS profile data will no longer be included in Ofsted's Inspection Data Summary Report
- the EYFS profile data will no longer be externally moderated by local authorities (LAs)

Changes to the EYFS profile have not impacted on the reception baseline assessment, which is a distinct assessment that serves a different purpose.

Individual schools and academies, governors and LAs will still have access to their EYFS profile data, so that this information can continue to be used to support children's transition to year 1 and to plan appropriate interventions.

However, the data should not be used by LAs, school leadership and multi-academy trusts for comparing individual schools as a means of holding teachers or schools to account on their data. Teachers are not expected to record evidence for each of the early learning goals or provide physical proof of the child's level of development for the purposes of completing the EYFS profile, or for the purposes of an Ofsted inspection.

As outlined in our inspection handbooks, inspectors do not expect to see documentation other than that set out in the EYFS framework. Inspectors will use the evidence gathered from discussions and observations to judge the overall quality of the curriculum provided for children.

Inspection practice

What's happened to the COVID-19 section which was in the previous edition of the school inspection handbook?

The dedicated COVID-19 section has been removed from the September 2022 edition of the school inspection handbook (published on 11 July 2022).

As all government restrictions were lifted some time ago, and we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, a dedicated COVID-19 section in the handbook is no longer appropriate.

However, we recognise that the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic may have impacted on what children know, remember and can do, resulting in some children having a wider-than-usual range of starting points and gaps in their knowledge.

Inspectors will continue to seek to understand any ongoing impact of the pandemic on providers, and will pay close attention to:

- how providers identify and address any of these delays and gaps
- what the provider is doing to address any disruption to learning to ensure that children are well prepared for their next stage of education
- how leaders have adapted their approaches as a result of the pandemic, including the rationale for any new or modified ways of working

Inspectors will take this into account when reaching final inspection judgements.

When carrying out deep dives, will inspectors want to see national curriculum subjects, rather than EYFS areas of learning, being taught in Reception?

The EYFS framework sets out the statutory requirements for learning and development for children up to and including Reception Year.

During this time, the curriculum should cover the 7 areas of learning. Early years leaders need to ensure that children experience a curriculum that is broad and ambitious to develop their vocabulary and that prepares them for their next stage of learning.

When carrying out deep dives in subjects, inspectors will not expect discrete lessons or teaching in those deep dive subjects in the early years. But they will be looking at the foundational knowledge children gain in that subject within the 7 areas of learning. This is the foundational knowledge that prepares children for learning in that subject from Year 1 onwards, and is clearly set out in the EYFS learning and development requirements.

Does Ofsted expect the national curriculum in a primary school to start when children first join in the early years?

Inspectors will want to know how key stage 1 builds on the knowledge that children learn in the early years. They will want to look at the curriculum through the eyes of a child from the moment children join the school to the time that they leave.

For example, when an inspector is doing a deep dive in history, they will also look at what foundational knowledge children learn about the world around them and about the past in the Reception Year. While inspectors would not expect to see a 'history lesson', they might ask leaders and teachers about their plans for children to learn the foundational knowledge, such as 'castle' and 'king', to enable understanding in history from Year 1 onwards. Conversations with leaders and teachers in the EYFS might direct inspectors to look at how the choices of stories that are read to children and the nursery rhymes and books that are shared with them give children an insight into foundational historical concepts for access to history lessons in key stage 1. Discussions might also shine a light on concepts that children learn during circle times, such as the nature of change and ageing when talking about family members; for example, children knowing about how families are constructed enables their learning about 'royal families' in history later on.

As outlined above, we set no expectations or requirements for planning or paperwork. This is up to schools to determine.

When should schools start teaching early reading?

The EYFS makes it clear that the development of children's spoken language underpins all 7 areas of learning. The revised EYFS emphasises the importance of developing children's vocabulary, to help them further up the school with reading comprehension and writing. The more words children can use, the easier they will find making sense of what they read.

Part 3 of the [school inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>) sets out what inspectors will look for when inspecting the teaching of early reading in infant, junior, primary and lower-middle schools, and how well the school teaches children to read from the beginning of Reception.

Paragraphs 386 to 394 set out how inspectors will reach their judgements on the quality of education in the early years.

When judging the quality of education, inspectors will want to see that:

- practitioners ensure that their own speaking, listening and reading of English enables children to hear and develop their own language and vocabulary well
- they read to children in a way that excites and engages them, introducing new ideas, concepts and vocabulary
- practitioners share information with parents about their child's progress in relation to the EYFS. They help parents to support and extend their child's learning at home, including how to encourage a love of reading
- children develop detailed knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning and use these in an age-appropriate way. Children develop their vocabulary and understanding of language across the EYFS curriculum
- children enjoy, listen attentively to and respond with comprehension to familiar stories, rhymes and songs that are appropriate to their age and stage of development

While we do not define exactly when children should start phonics in the Reception class, as this is up to schools to decide, schools should start as soon as possible. They should not wait to start teaching early reading until the baseline assessment is complete. Inspectors will want to understand how schools design the reading curriculum to give children the best start in Reception, so that they are well on the way to becoming fluent readers.

The DfE published '[The reading framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy)' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy>) in July 2021. It provides helpful guidance to schools about the early stages of both reading and writing, including language comprehension. The section on children at risk of reading failure may also be particularly helpful to schools supporting individuals who need extra help to get back on track.

How does the education inspection framework apply to the teaching of early reading in schools that have an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS?

The formal teaching of reading may be delayed by [an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-learning-and-development-requirements-guidance-on-exemptions-for-early-years-providers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-learning-and-development-requirements-guidance-on-exemptions-for-early-years-providers>). In these cases, inspectors will hear children from Years 5 to 6 read instead of Years 1 to 3. They will listen to pupils read from unseen books appropriate to their stage of progress to see whether they have the reading knowledge and skills, including the phonic knowledge, appropriate for a child in Years 5 to 6. This will inform the quality of education judgement. Further information is available in the [non-association independent schools inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-schools-inspection-handbook-eif/non-association-independent-schools-handbook--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-schools-inspection-handbook-eif/non-association-independent-schools-handbook--2>) (paragraphs 210 to 215).

COVID-19 pandemic

Will Ofsted negatively judge schools for having ‘stripped-back, COVID-safe provision’, for example provision with no soft furnishings, dressing-up clothes, pillows or cosy spaces, and no sand or water?

We know that some schools have changed what they deliver, and how they deliver it, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while we will not judge schools negatively on how they have been delivering their EYFS provision during the pandemic and as we emerge from it, inspectors may ask why schools are still offering ‘stripped-back’ provision.

Inspectors will seek to understand any ongoing impact of the pandemic and how schools have adapted their approaches as a result of the pandemic, including the rationale for any new or modified ways of working. Inspectors will also want to see the extent to which leaders have designed an ambitious and well-sequenced early years curriculum, how they are addressing any disruption and how they are ensuring that any gaps in knowledge are closed so that children are prepared for their next stage of education.

Are there flexibilities in place for providers that are facing recruitment and retention issues or experiencing high numbers of staff off sick? Will Ofsted take this into consideration when inspecting?

Paragraph 3.31 of the EYFS framework states:

“ Exceptionally, and where the quality of care and safety and security of children is maintained, changes to the ratios may be made.”

Early years settings and schools, however, remain responsible for ensuring the safety and security of children in their care. Inspectors will want to understand how providers are continuing to meet this requirement if temporarily using the existing ratio flexibilities set out in the EYFS framework.

[↑ Back to top](#)

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