

Re-opening early years and foundation stage provision

Following on from the Prime Ministers announcement on Sunday 10th of May, it is anticipated that the majority of schools and settings will begin to open up in a controlled, phased way for their children, including the reception year.

Whilst it is absolutely vital that we continue to prevent the spread of infection and all continue to remain safe, what could the EYFS curriculum look and feel like for the remainder of this academic year, and possibly beyond?

Firstly, there is absolutely no requirement or pressure to teach, catch up or cram learning which the children have missed during the lock down period. In line with other age groups, there should be no attempt to undertake a rapid 'catch up' in the remaining time. We must all acknowledge and accept that it is okay for children not be where we would normally expect them to be at this time of the year. A huge chunk of time for learning has been lost.

For our EYFS curriculum children, thinking needs to be focussing on the essential skills, attitudes and behaviours that will help the children to recover, adjust back into school routine and ensure that they are equipped for the learning that comes after what will be a mid-summer term transition back into a shortened Early Years' experience.

Back to basics?

For many children, time spent at home may not have been the rich, immersive or well-planned experience that they get in school. From anecdotal discussions with Early Years colleagues during April and May, most children have been safely occupied. Some have had a limited continuation of learning, particularly around phonics, reading, writing or number. Whilst a few may have had teaching from a knowledgeable parent who may also be a teacher. So with this wide range of experiences and levels of support, where do we start when children come back into school?

The whole child experience – *Think Maslow.*

Firstly, as skilful, sensitive practitioners we must properly acknowledge and support PSED and wellbeing. It must be remembered that small children are very sensitive and have a strong need for social contact.

We need to listen sensitively and actively, allowing children to talk about, recount and recall their individual experiences whilst they were away from school. We must help them to come to terms with events such as the possible death of close family, loss of contact with friends, generally being isolated from others for a considerable length of time, and possibly only being surrounded by adults for weeks at a time.

Furthermore, while following the national lockdown recommendations, children have mainly been confined indoors, so we will need to address and support their physical needs and learning, ensuring that we revisit and consolidate previously acquired skills before introducing new ones.

Finally, we need to ensure that if an individual child or family requires additional support, that we quickly signpost / access this as soon as possible. The effects of the lockdown experience may, for some children, have a long lasting impact and we all need to be sensitive and mindful of this over the coming weeks and months.

Helping young children to re-establish themselves back into school, and supporting and continuing to promote good behaviours for socialising and learning, is vital for children's short and longer term success.

In support of this, the small amount of time that children have left in their reception year, together with the probability of reception children only being in school on a part-time or on a voluntary basis, suggests that staff should continue to follow the EYFS curriculum, and begin by specifically focussing on the re-introduction, repeating (revisiting), and consolidation of

- all elements of the characteristics of effective learning
- personal, social and emotional development
- communication and language
- physical development
- revisiting phonics
- revisiting number recognition and counting

Assessment

Some school or Early Years staff may feel it is appropriate to sensitively assess or 'baseline' children's retention of previous phonic or mathematical work up to the close of school in March. This decision should be made locally and it must be done in a developmentally appropriate way, and not be part of a rush to test or catch-up.

Revisiting previous learning, acknowledging learning that has taken place at home, and on-going communications from parents (during the lock down period) should all form part of your professional knowledge, and it is this information and a commentary on the children's Characteristics of Effective Learning that will, no doubt, form the basis of the transition activities for the children moving into Year 1.

Please be aware that if you have children who have maintained their early years learning experience and do not have any appreciable gaps in their learning, experiences or knowledge, then of course, it is completely appropriate for them to continue their full and rich EYFS journey to its completion at the end of the summer term.

In its *Early Years Foundation Stage Corona Virus Disapplication* document (20th April 2020, section 5.2), the government set out its intention for schools not to be required to complete the EYFS profile for the Summer term 2020, stating that "the Early Years Assessment Stage Profile (EYFSP) will not need to be undertaken in the academic year 2019/20."

What this means in practice:

The EYFSP is usually undertaken in the final term of the year in which a child turns 5 and involves teachers assessing each child's level of development against

each of the seventeen ELGs. The results are usually shared with parent/carers, Year 1 teachers and the Local Authority, and they form national statistics. There will be no statutory requirement for schools to undertake the EYFSP in 2019/20.

Schools are still free to complete EYFSP assessments for children if they are able to, and to share with parents and carers and Year 1 teachers at an appropriate time, but they are not required to. If they do choose to assess children, they do not need to share data with their Local Authority and Local Authorities will not be required to moderate any assessments that are carried out in 2019/20.

In agreement with the government, this also remains the position of the LA for this current academic year.

We need to remain confident and recognise that children from across the entire school population will not be where we would be expected to be at this time of the school year, and that this is entirely accepted and appropriate for this 2019 – 2020 cohort.

In the longer term, we should all remain confident that over time with “quality first teaching” and sensitive, skilled practitioners the devastating effects that the Covid-19 virus has had on children’s education right across the county will be reduced.

Transition into Reception year 2020

The regular and well-established practice of welcoming children into school (transition) has been seriously disrupted due to schools being closed. Early Years staff are keenly aware of this and are using appropriate technology and phone contacts with parents and new children in order to continue the transition process remotely.

The LA recommend that staff continue to use their best endeavours to support transitions into school for children joining in the Autumn term, and that they continue to collect learning journals and records from other professionals such as pre-schools, childminders and nurseries. They should hold professional discussions with previous practitioners and new parents, to ensure that any additional needs of a child have been identified and measures put in place to support their transition in to the Reception class.