



Guide to navigating the EYFS

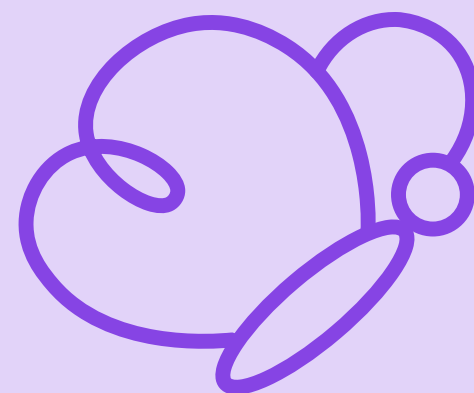


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About this guide



We released the first version of this guide in line with the revised EYFS, back in 2021. Just like the 2021 EYFS, we wanted to talk about the end of statement-based tracking and planning, excessive assessment data, and piles of paperwork and administration.

And now, two years later, Family are still celebrating the refreshed focus on practitioner knowledge and expertise, quality time with children, and a push to create unique and tailored early years provision... just like the rest of the sector!

But there are still questions to answer and settings who need a little help. Where do you start with something like building an entire curriculum? How do you plan if you're used to always following the next line in Development Matters? We're here to help with that.

This guide will help build your confidence in how to work with the EYFS in your setting. You'll find tips on planning, where to start with creating a curriculum, and how to monitor progress - all without a tick-box in sight. The EYFS itself should always be your first port-of-call, but with input from early years managers, teachers, and consultants, this guide will help you put it all into practice.

Finally, you'll hear from Ofsted on what they're really looking for when they come to visit and relieve some of the uncertainty surrounding inspections.

Let's get into it!

Supporting documents:

In line with the EYFS, there's also curriculum guidance in the form of the Development Matters document (from the DfE) and Birth to Five Matters (from the Early Years Coalition). Unlike the EYFS, neither of these are statutory, meaning you can use them as little (or as much) as you like to support the curriculum you deliver at your setting. See our 'other useful resources' page to have a look at them, as well as a few other handy documents.



Our expert contributors

In this guide you'll hear from:



Dr Julian Grenier

A His Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI) and Early Education Lead

Dr Julian Grenier is one of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and Early Education Lead at Ofsted. He is also the author of the 2021 edition of Development Matters. We interviewed Julian when he was the headteacher of Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre co-lead.



Sue Cowley

Early years teacher, consultant, and author

Sue is a presenter, teacher trainer, and author of over 30 books on education and parenting. She is a consultant, a qualified early years teacher, and an expert on behaviour.



Alison Featherbe

Early years consultant, trainer, and mentor

Alison is now an early years consultant, having been a SENCO and a Local Authority development officer. Alison mentors EYITT students and delivers training on sustained shared thinking, emotional well-being, and safeguarding.

... and from:



Wendy Ratcliff

A His Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI) and the Principal Officer for Early Education

His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) Wendy Ratcliff is the Principal Officer for Early Education at Ofsted. With over twenty years of experience, Wendy is an expert in Ofsted's inspection of early years settings.



Dr Sue Allingham

Early years consultant, trainer, and author

Sue is a consultant at Early Years Out of the Box, specialising in early years curriculum (including the observation, assessment, and planning cycle), enabling environments, transitions, inclusion, and the characteristics of effective teaching and learning.



Louise Lloyd-Evans

Founder and director of Young Friends Kindergarten

Louise is the founder and director of Young Friends Kindergarten, an Ofsted-graded Outstanding setting, in Hove. Louise supports other settings to adopt a sustainable and nature-based curriculum, as well as create a more sustainable provision generally. Louise created SNAP (Sustainable Nurseries Against Plastic) and you can now find Louise on her subscription membership platform, 'The Tribe'.

... and from:



Phil Minns
Senior His Majesty's Inspector for
Early Curriculum

Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Phil Minns, is a qualified teacher with specialist knowledge of early years education. Phil has National Leader of Education (NLE) status.



Charlotte Bateman
Managing Director at Little Barn
Owls Nursery Group

Charlotte is the Managing Director at Little Barn Owls Nursery Group, a farm and forest school nursery group in Sussex. All three of their settings are graded Outstanding by Ofsted. Charlotte is passionate about CPD and is a project-based learning consultant, supporting other educators to deliver project-based learning in their settings.



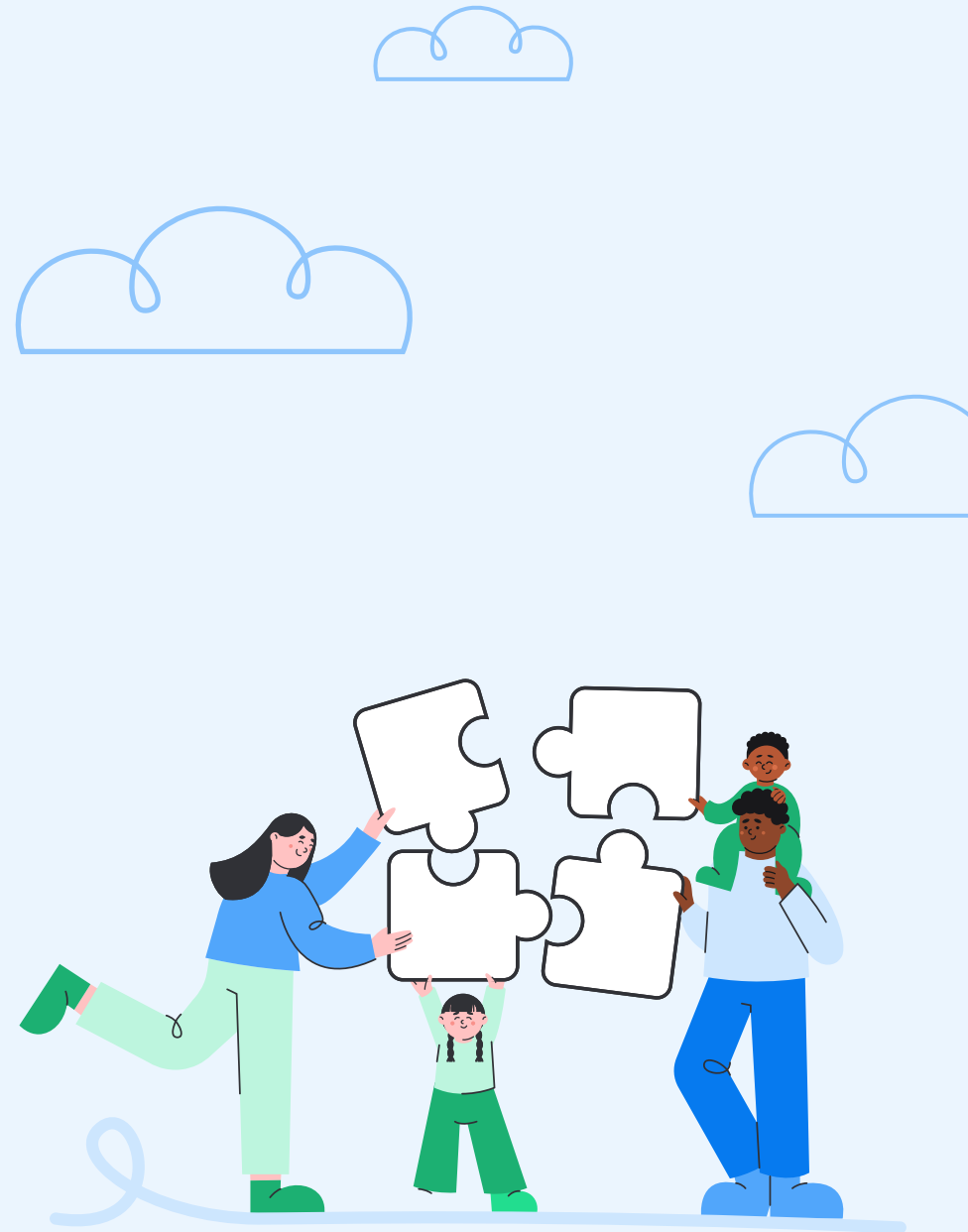
Michele Barrett
Executive Head Teacher of
Randolph Beresford Early Years
Centre and Vanessa Nursery
School

Michele is the Executive Head Teacher at federated nursery schools, Randolph Beresford Early Years Centre and Vanessa Nursery School in London. Both are graded as Outstanding by Ofsted. Michele is the Area Lead on the DfE Covid Recovery Programme and is passionate about inclusion.

Why were the changes made to the EYFS in 2021 so significant?

What made the changes to the EYFS in 2021 so important?

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework from September 2021 came with significant changes from its predecessor. With big goals of reducing paperwork for educators and improving outcomes for children, there was plenty of new information for educators to consider.



So what changed?

Let's break it down:

- There were some changes to the Early Learning Goals (for the end of children's reception year), for example:
 - PSED now includes self-regulation.
 - Physical Development is split into fine and gross motor skills.
 - Communication and Language now has 'understanding' within 'listening and attention'.
 - Mathematics no longer includes shape, space, and measure.
- Reception teachers now have to complete a Reception Baseline Assessment.
- The educational programmes (which describe each of the 7 areas of learning) were made longer, a bit more detailed, and include examples of things that you can do with children, especially in regards to developing their speech and vocabulary.
- There was a new requirement to "promote the good health, including the oral health, of children attending the setting." A lot of educators interpreted this as them having to start brushing childrens' teeth, but that's not the case - you can interpret it however you see fit for your setting.



Why was the EYFS changed so significantly?

The changes were made with the aims to:

- Better prepare children for Key Stage 1.
- Improve outcomes at age 5, particularly in early language and literacy.
- Reduce paperwork for practitioners, with a view to spending more time interacting with children.



And what changed in practice?

Well, probably not a huge amount. Things like considering oral health or focusing on early communication were almost certainly already embedded in most settings.

However, this was a huge turning point in the amount of paperwork required in the EYFS, especially around assessment, curriculum and planning. Sue Allingham reminded educators at the time:

- Don't do anything just for 'evidence', especially not for Ofsted (find out more on that in our Ofsted section).
- Consider how little mandatory paperwork there really is. The 2-year check, (and for reception year teachers) the RBA and the EYFSP are the only assessments you must complete.
- Keep only what's genuinely useful to you, the children and parents, and your practice.

What about now?

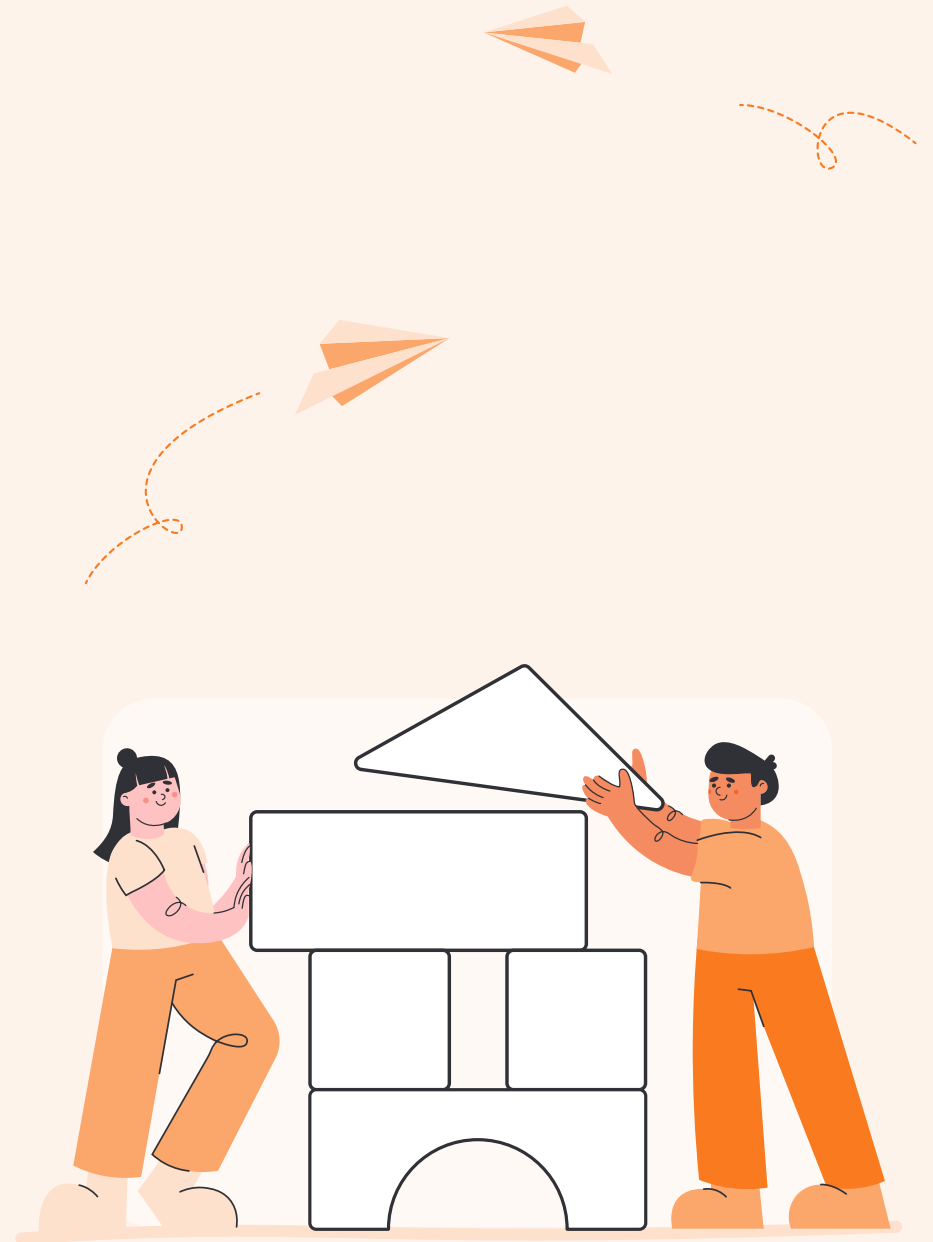
Two years later, these core themes still apply. Aside from a change to ratios and the removal of the Early Years Foundation Stage coronavirus disapplications, the document remains pretty much the same.

How to build your own curriculum



How to build your own curriculum

Your setting's own curriculum choices are a big focus in the EYFS, but it needn't be intimidating, or even a huge change from what you're already doing in your practice. Sue Cowley, Julian Grenier, and Michele Barrett offer some advice on what 'curriculum' really means and where to start with building one.



First, what actually is a 'curriculum'?

Sue Cowley explains, "Everything you do in an early years setting is part of your 'curriculum': children's physical and emotional development is as important as their academic learning. They're learning throughout the day, with the prime areas threaded through every aspect of provision. Children are never not learning to communicate, developing physically or becoming more socially confident while they are with you".



What does it say in the EYFS?

There are statutory requirements for your curriculum and provision, set out by the EYFS:

- Practitioners need to decide what they want children in their setting to learn, and the most effective ways to teach it.
- Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults - practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately.
- Practitioners must stimulate children's interests, responding to each child's emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions coupled with secure routines for play and learning.

How should I document my curriculum?

The way that works best for your setting. Ofsted themselves state, "Ofsted does not require providers to provide EYFS curriculum planning in any specific format for inspection."

The first steps to building your own curriculum

1. Start with your values

Instead of pondering 'what Ofsted wants', a great way to start thinking about curriculum is to consider your provision and what it offers to those who use it. Ask yourself what makes us 'us'? If you could choose three things to define your setting, what would they be?

2. Analyse your provision

Another useful way to define your 'curriculum' is to think your way through a day/week in your setting:

- What do you do at each point in your daily/weekly routine and why do you do it?
- What skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes do the children develop as a result of the things you choose to do with them?
- Which bits of your routine matter most to the children and families in your setting?
- What do you hope the children get out of each day at your setting?

3 . Think resources

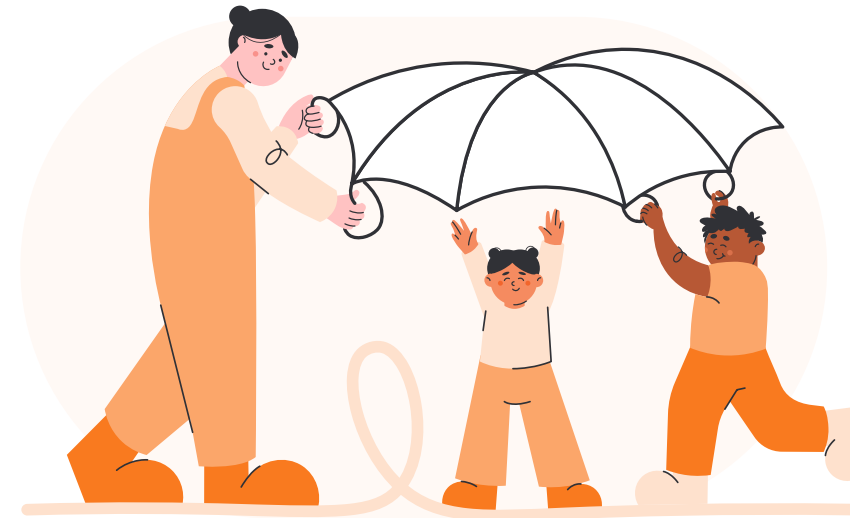
Combine an audit of your resources with discussions about why you use each one and the knowledge or skills it helps children develop. Consider how equitable and representative your resources are, and the subtext sent to children. For example, do you have storybooks where children can see all kinds of people, places, communities and families valued, including ones similar to their own?

4 . Focus on your cohort

Julian Grenier explains that when he was the headteacher of Sherringham Nursery School, over 90% of the children at his setting had EAL, so there needed to be a focus on supporting children's early communication, understanding and English language. His advice is to think about what's particularly important to the children you're working with, then represent that in the sort of experiences, the adult-guided learning, and child-chosen play activities that you're offering.

5 . Ensure inclusivity and accessibility

Your curriculum, like the EYFS, is for every child in your setting. It must be inclusive and remove barriers to learning and experiences. Headteacher Michele Barrett has the setting's SENCo join the team's daily evaluation meeting to discuss inclusive provision for all children. Children with individual care plans complete their activities with their peers as part of the main curriculum.



Great observations





What makes a great observation in the Early Years?

What makes a great observation in the early years? We asked the experts to give us their top tips for insightful and meaningful observations, every time.

Make use of the reference material

The EYFS framework and the Ofsted inspection framework focus heavily on professional judgement. But that doesn't mean that you're not supposed to use the reference material. "Always go back to the source documents," advises Sue Allingham.

Think outside the tick-boxes

Louise and the team at Young Friends hold training sessions, group discussions, and one-on-one chats to brush up on their child development knowledge and build their confidence in recording observations outside of a tick-list framework.

You don't always need to note 'What's next'

Alison Featherbe advises "Next Steps have been huge for such a long time, but they can be too literal. We've got to use our gut feelings and instincts about how children learn, and take a more holistic approach to children's growth and progress."

Never write an observation about something a child couldn't do

"If a child is struggling to do something, and you're ignoring them to write about it, it's not benefiting their wellbeing," says Michele Barrett. In the time it took to write something down that a child needs help with, you could have helped them to do it.



Support parents to observe too

To support parents to make observations, Little Barn Owls send familiar resources home with children. That way parents have a place to start.

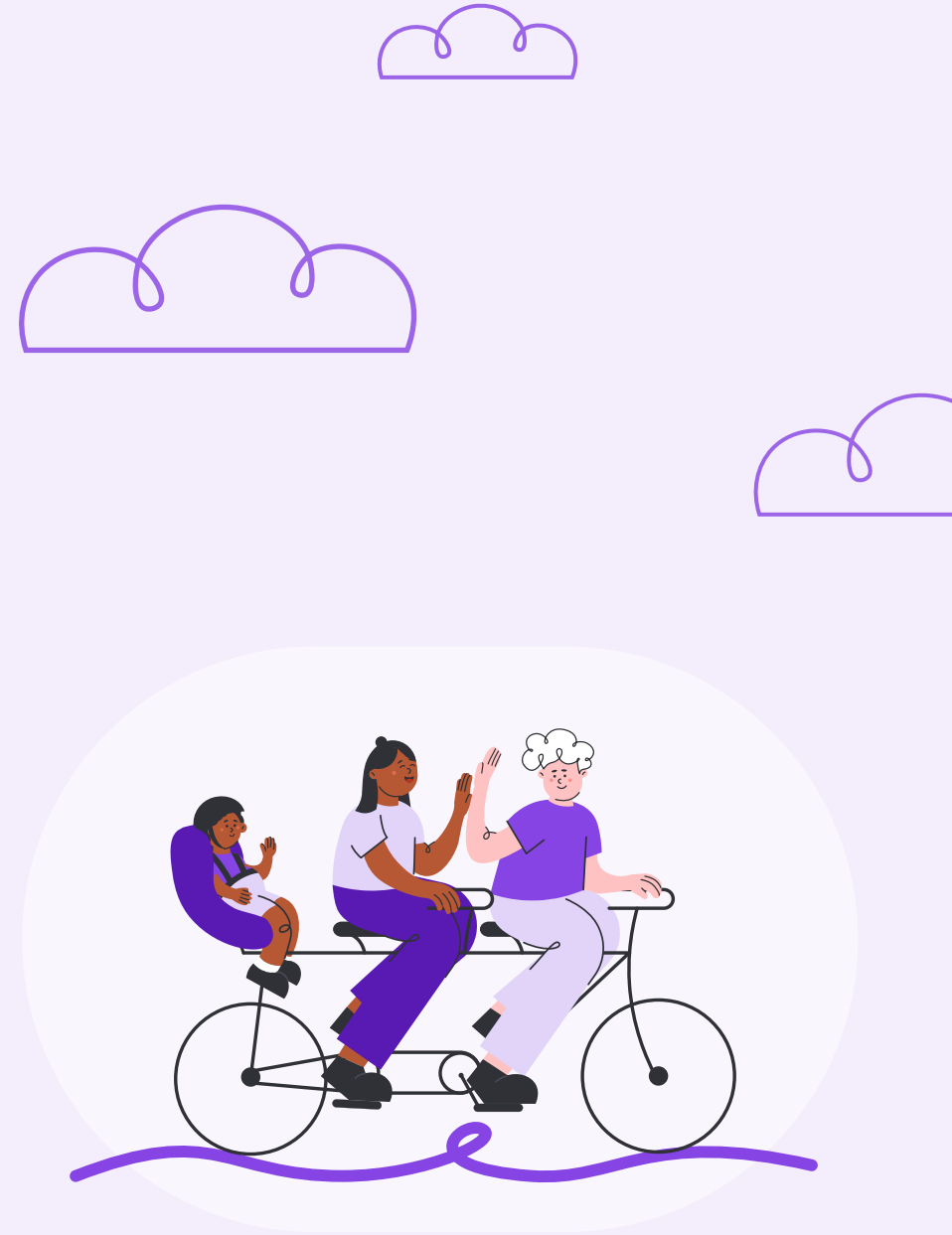
Keep it concise

A photo can be more meaningful than a whole paragraph. “Imagine you were on the phone to that parent,” Michele Barrett tells her team, “Write the observation like that - just note down what happened”.

What progress and assessment look like in the EYFS

What progress and assessment look like in the EYFS

The EYFS itself is clear that the only mandatory assessments are the Reception Baseline Assessment, the Early Years Profile, and the 2-year check. So how should you be monitoring progress?



1 . Observe and assess in the moment

Much like 'next steps', the majority of assessment is in-the-moment. Julian Grenier advises that we should notice carefully what children can and can't do, and respond to that in the moment with feedback. This is where not having to document everything is so valuable. If you're focused on getting a lot of evidence, you may miss the moment with the child. Julian says: "Children's learning is a spider web, not a motorway, so we've got to rethink this excessive focus on progress targets and data tracking."

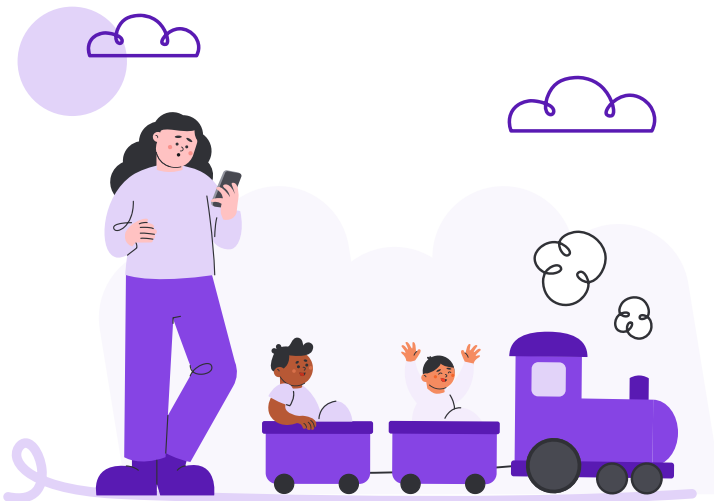
2 . Keep it as simple as possible

Assessment should focus on progress and what a child can do, not pages and pages of analysis and stages. There is no prescribed way of doing a 'written' summative assessment outside of the mandatory ones, so keep it simple! "If you're expected to track progress in your setting, it can be as simple as 'on track' or 'not on track' - it's as easy as that," says Sue Allingham. Ofsted echoes this sentiment - "Practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement and should not be required to prove this through collection of physical evidence."

"Assessment is about noticing that children make progress. It's about making sure we've got the curriculum and the care routines right, that all children can access."



Julian Grenier, Author,
Development Matters



3. Re-think age bands and stages

Julian Grenier reminds us that age banding is not very helpful, and gives these examples:

- A child who joins your setting when they are 3 years old may not have had some of the experiences that the other three-year-olds in the setting have had. It's not helpful to label them as 'younger' by assessing them to be at the developmental level of a 2-year-old, for example. Instead, focus on how you can present a variety of opportunities for that 3-year-old to access.
- A SEND child, for example, isn't '2 years younger' in their development - they've got a different pathway of development.
- The same applies to a child who's 3 and has EAL, should not be assessed 'as a 2-year-old' in English. They don't need the same support and help as a two-year-old native English speaker.

What should you include?

- What children are really good at
- What the strengths are in their learning
- If you're concerned about a child's development, as a setting you should assess what the barriers are to that child accessing the curriculum, and making good progress. Then work as a setting to remove those barriers to learning and experiences, rather than bringing children 'up to speed'.

Louise Lloyd-Evans of Young Friends Nature Nursery sums it up by reminding us that, "Assessments aren't tools for catching 'delays', but for scaffolding support plans".



Breaking down planning and next steps

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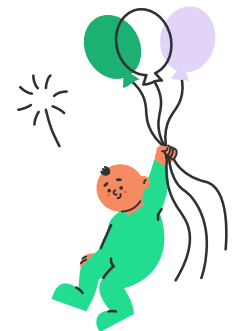
Breaking down planning and next steps

Without statement-based tracking, how can you ensure you're planning great provision for your children?

Planning should meet the needs and interests of children

You should not just 'tick off' the next box in Development Matters. 'In-the-moment' or 'emergent' planning is one of the most effective ways to introduce child-led learning and move away from statement-based planning. It works because:

- It means children are engaged and involved, as you're facilitating and expanding their current pursuit with them.
- Children's interests will be changing from week to week. By being 'in the moment', you can observe and work on a child's interests as they arrive, rather than turning towards a pre-planned task.
- With less planning comes less paperwork, meaning less time spent in your office away from the children.



Here's how Little Barn Owls in Sussex formalised daily emergent planning in their setting:

- At the end of each day, educators hold 'sprint' planning meetings, where they use their written observations from the day to plan what to provide for children tomorrow and what resources are needed.
- The next day, during the children's 'Proposal Time', Little Barn Owls educators explain what's on offer in the setting (based on their sprint meeting the previous evening), parents' observations, children's input, or something going on at the setting - the toddlers recently spontaneously took a walk over the road to see a building site.
- Then children plan their day themselves, continuing their own chosen projects and enquiries.

"I think [the changes to the EYFS in 2021] will really get practitioners to find a way that fits for them, so they can move forward, away from a tick-box-based planning system."



Charlotte Bateman, Managing
Director, Little Barn Owls

So what about 'next steps'?

Sue Allingham recommends that you think of it like a child enjoying a jigsaw. As you interact, you get another – more difficult – puzzle from the cupboard saying “I wonder if we can do this one?” The ‘next step’ has already happened, in practice. And, this is so much more effective than just writing, “Next step: try a harder puzzle.”

Next steps are about:

- Understanding what is happening for a child, right then, in the moment.
- What our role (as an educator) is in the interaction with the child – they are our own ‘next steps’ to focus on in order to inform our teaching.

They are not:

- Targets for children.
- Recording an observation, then choosing a ‘next step’ by looking through the Development Matters statements and deciding on a point to write down.

“We observe and cover ‘next steps’ hundreds of times a day, challenging learning and making teaching points as we go.”



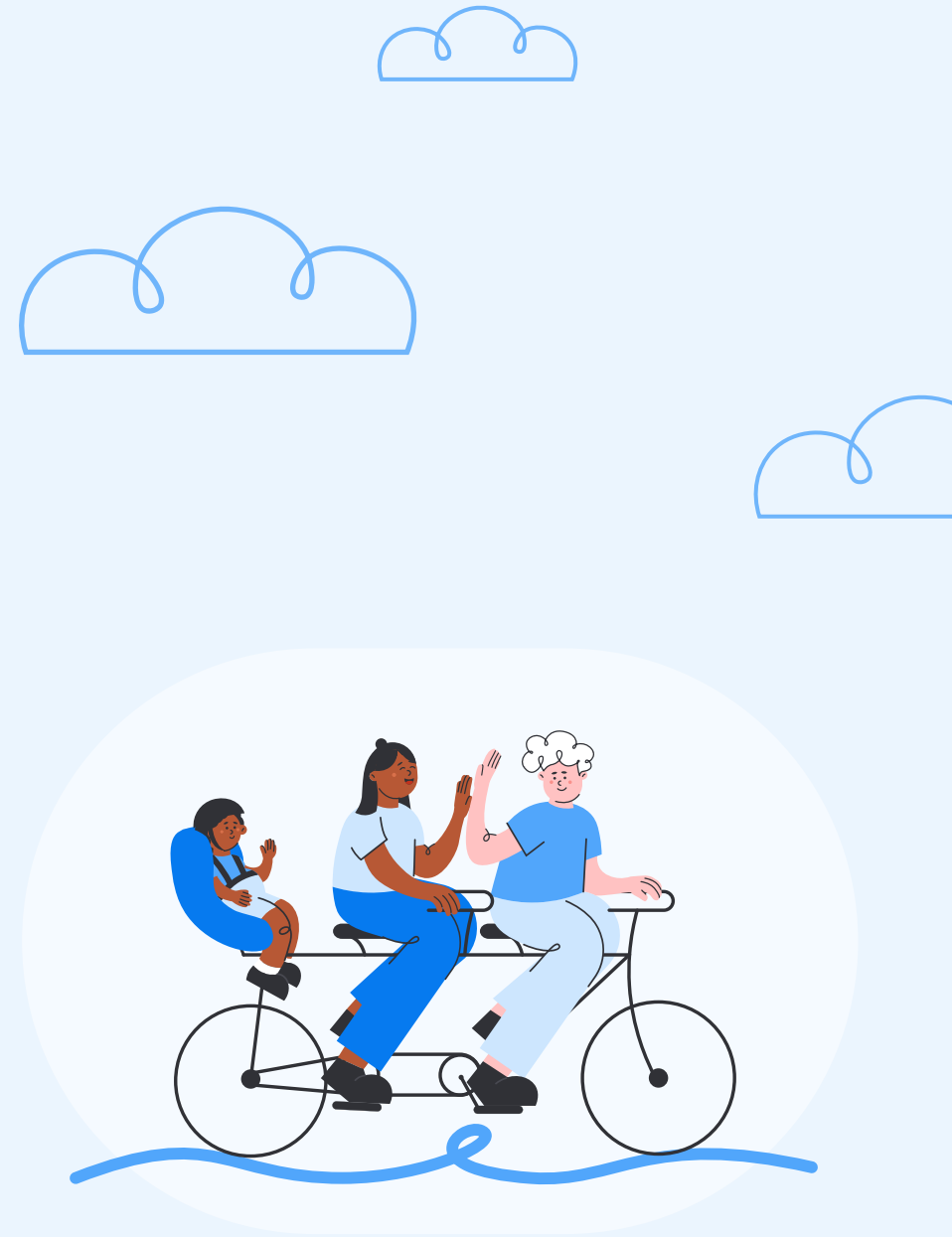
Sue Allingham, Early Years
Consultant, EY Out of the Box

A note from Ofsted about paperwork



A note from Ofsted about paperwork

The goal of an Ofsted inspection is to find out what's going on at your setting and how it feels to be a child there on a normal day - not to read your 'Ofsted' folder and look at assessment data.



Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Phil Minns, explains that Ofsted does not have set expectations around paperwork. You will be asked what you want children to learn and why, how you're helping children to know more, and how you measure their success. It is up to you to decide how you present this, you just have to be able to explain why.

All of Ofsted's inspection handbooks are available on their website, as they're keen to dispel the myths that they're there to look at your data.

Ofsted do not want to see:

- Ticklists
- Tracking
- Assessment data

Instead, inspectors will observe, take a 'Learning Walk' through the setting with leadership, and spend time with children, staff, and parents, to find out:

- The Intent - What you want the children to learn, know, and develop, based on how well you know the children.
- The Implementation - What it is that you're doing with your children to achieve the Intent.
- The Impact - What it's like to be a child at your setting.

"Providers should do nothing for Ofsted - everything providers do should be for the children, as fundamentally, children do best when they have high-quality interactions with adults"



Phil Minns, Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Ofsted

Other useful resources



Other useful resources

If you want to learn even more about the new EYFS and everything around it, we gathered some links for you to extend your knowledge.

- [The Famly Sessions: EYFS 2021 Q&A with Sue Allingham](#)
- [Famly's Navigating the New EYFS series](#)
- [The Famly Sessions: Future of EYFS Assessment and Tracking with Julian Grenier, on behalf of the Department of Education, as well as Ofsted's Wendy Ratcliff and Phill Minns.](#)
- [The Famly Interview: Jan Dubiel on Building a Meaningful Curriculum for Every Child](#)
- [What Is The True Purpose of Next Steps? By Sue Allingham](#)
- [In the Moment Planning: How to Get Started](#)
- [Department for Education website](#)
- [The Ofsted website](#) and their [Early Years Inspection Handbook](#)
- [Early Years Foundation Stage Framework](#)
- [The SEND Code of Practice](#) and [The Early Years Guide to the SEND Code of Practice](#)
- [Birth to Five Matters](#)
- [Development Matters](#)

