

Assessment- for all children and adjustments needed for SEND provision

This note was written by the Solihull Early Years Team Manager in discussion with the team to clarify the current position in Solihull with a focus on assessment.

The context:

With the revised EYFS republished for use from September 2021, came a lot of reflection and some anxiety. Practitioners in Solihull, as with many other local authorities, had been slowly encouraged into systems which did not match the balance needed between observation and evidence collection to guide children's learning effectively. The EYFS revision and re emphasis on assessment for learning have aimed to redress this balance. This is to ensure practitioners are available to support children's learning, and especially their language and interactions, in the moment when it is needed as a priority.

Truth

The ELGs have been updated and are statutory. They are intended to be used only as a summative judgement -when completing the EYFSP at the end of Reception.

The Development Matters (old and new) is not a statutory document but can be used to guide practitioners understanding of child development. There is other guidance, also not statutory, that can support this too.

The New Development Matters guidance includes observation checkpoints. These are designed to support early years practitioners to make accurate judgements about children's achievements against typical child development milestones.

There are three statutory assessment and reporting requirements which are outlined in the EYFS Statutory Guidance. These are the progress check at age 2 years old, reception baseline check and the EYFSP.

Ofsted will not ask to see tracking and evidence of children's attainment and progress. They will expect you to know your children well and to be planning to meet their needs.

The EYFS and SEN Code of Practice outlines the expectation that practitioners are alert to emerging difficulties and respond early. This may involve including others to advise settings and parents, and regularly reflecting on the adjustments being made to support a child's development.

Settings have a duty to know, understand and implement a graduated response for children with identified learning needs that require something different from or more than a settings usual practice and provision. This requires some evidence of the support the setting has implemented and tracking of a child's individual progress against appropriate smart targets.

You are being asked to reflect on what you do to support every child's care, learning and development. This includes reducing practitioner workload and the collection of unnecessary 'evidence' of learning.

Ofsted have made it very clear....You don't have to do anything because you think Ofsted wants it. The EYFS Statutory Guidance tells you what you must and should do.

Myth

It is not true that we no longer need to assess children. For children on a typical developmental pathway, you don't need to collect evidence to show a child's developmental stage or create charts and graphs to demonstrate progress- if you don't feel this support children's learning. You do, however, need to understand how children typically develop and how you can best support them. Some children will need you to plan smaller steps to success.

You can't use the 'old' Development Matters- yes you can if this is helpful.

The developmental statements are still valuable to support practitioner knowledge of child development and make accurate judgements that children are thriving/developing typically.

What do you need to do?

You need to carefully think through any changes you make to ensure all practitioners understand the reasons for new ways of working. You need to make sure any new approaches support *all* children, ensuring they get the support that they need to make good progress.

If you have already made changes to your assessment systems, then you may want to reflect on how well this is working for staff and to meet children's needs.

We don't support children's transitions by telling them something will happen tomorrow and then expecting them to understand and be able to make that change effectively without any anxiety. As staff we need time to understand and embed changes too. Let's think about what children, and our teams need, to ensure every child is supported to succeed. Ofsted are identifying we may need to re look at some of our assessment practices to support a deep understanding of child development and effective implementation of our curriculums.

Recent Ofsted Inspection reports in Solihull suggested settings

- *use assessments of children's achievements to plan even more precisely for their next steps
- *provide even more opportunities for children to be challenged in their learning to support them to make the best possible progress
- *improve the planning of activities and ensure that learning intentions are appropriately targeted and implemented to enable children to make consistently good progress,
- *develop knowledge of how to adapt teaching to ensure clear differentiation of learning for children during planned activities.

Might these suggestions apply to your setting- how do you know?

These conclusions were drawn from evidence when inspectors observed practice and talked to adults about the children's needs, interests, knowledge and skills and how they are supporting them, rather than from paperwork. They are checking that children are supported to make the progress they are capable of.

What the EYFS says

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential.

Children develop and learn at different rates. 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. Early years providers must guide the development of children's capabilities with a view to ensuring that children in their care complete the EYFS ready to benefit fully from the opportunities ahead of them. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, 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.

Throughout the early years, if a child's progress in any prime area gives cause for concern, practitioners must discuss this with the child's parents and/or carers and agree how to support the child. Practitioners must consider whether a child may have a special educational need or disability which requires specialist support. They should link with, and help families to access, relevant services from other agencies as appropriate.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974907/EYFS_framework_-_March_2021.pdf

What Ofsted say

We consider a curriculum (or programme of learning) to be a progression model. A coherently planned and well-sequenced curriculum enables children to make progress by knowing more, understanding more and being able to do more.

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.... When practitioners are clear about what children already know and can do, and what they need to learn next, then they can decide what to teach the children and how best to use their time with them to ensure that they learn the intended curriculum. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-eif-inspections-and-the-eyfs/the-eyfs-in-schools>

Inspectors will evaluate how well practitioners ensure that the content, sequencing and progression in the areas of learning are secured and whether they demand enough of children and children develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills across the areas of learning. This includes that children, including those children from disadvantaged backgrounds, do well and those with SEND achieve the best possible outcomes. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif/>

What this looks like for all children

Professional judgement is very important. Practitioners who understand how children learn and develop are the best resources we have in our Solihull settings. Most children, when provided with a carefully thought out and structured progressive curriculum and responsible pedagogy, will thrive. They will be 'on-track' against our curriculum expectations if you want to use a term many have adopted.

Settings do not need to make 3 observations a day or create a many paged learning journey to evidence this progress. They can talk about their knowledge of the child and why they are supporting them in the way they are.

Parents will value learning journeys. Observations may help a discussion about what this tells us about a child and what may support them next in your planning (whether written or discussed and considered planning).

There will be times when, for groups or individual children, you want to observe, discuss, chat with others to consider and support the child's need. You will need to consider how to adapt teaching to ensure clear differentiation of learning for children who have different needs. One child may be more interested in retelling a story if you use resources outside. Another may need the book as a prompt to retell. Some may need to focus just on retelling part of a story, such as the end, if the whole story is too much for them. For some you may want to look at how you can invent a slight change to the story, to change the setting or the ending, as they can already confidently retell stories.

You do not need tick sheets, electronic or paper evidence collection, or over burdensome tracking to support these children.

What is different for children needing significant levels of additional support

There are some children in your care who may need more finely graded steps of planning and assessment to support their development. You may find you are returning to guidance which outlines typical

development steps more frequently to consider how best to support a child to share attention or to build vocabulary. We all do this. Documents such as Development Matters (old or new) and Birth to Five Matters were developed to be a useful reference point and they are useful for this.

Smaller steps of progress such as those outlined in The Early Years Development Journal, and links below, are also helpful small step guides. These are the children you need to focus on most to ensure they are well known, and you use available resources to best help them make progress towards the early learning goals across the aspects of learning.

If you think that a child is not yet speaking at a typical developmental stage you'd expect for their age, you will consider how you know this and what can you do to support them. The answer is not solely to refer to speech and language therapy although this may be one of the actions you take. You, along with parents, need to support their next steps now. Although external future support may guide you more specifically as well as celebrate the strategies you are already using.

Stripping back the knowledge we have about these children to a statement such as 'off track' or 'birth to three' without a thorough understanding of the child's current knowledge, skills and understanding is not helpful. We need to understand them and plan for what they next need to support their learning journey.

Our Solihull SEND referral systems, as they stand, still rely upon information about a child matched to a developmental norm reference. This helps people, along with the description of a child's interests, skills and needs, to consider their current stage of development. The Early Years Team can help you to find guidance to support you to understand typical small development steps. This does not mean you need to highlight paperwork, tick boxes, and remove yourself from interacting with a child and supporting them whilst you make post-it records of what they do. It does mean understanding and reflecting on what they can do now independently and what will help them to successfully gain skills they cannot current do alone.

Relevant and appropriate aspects of the work you do with children who have extra needs will need to be recorded to demonstrate and share with other appropriate professionals and parents if you need to make referrals to specialist support services.

To conclude, it is important to understand that assessment and planning are still critical to teaching and learning. Some children need you to observe them more to ensure you plan to help them develop the critical skills they need so that they can engage in learning opportunities. Use your knowledge of child development, or guidance which is available as a reference, to support this.

We know that there will be an on-line EHCP developed in the future, and this will support a move to a national way of recording SEND needs. Most children do not need this higher level of focussed assessment, or a summative judgement recorded in the way we currently ask you to for SEND support. Help practitioners use their knowledge and skills to assess what children can do and articulate how they build on this without requiring detailed documentation as evidence.

Further guidance.....

<https://www.solgrid.org.uk/eyc/resources/send/> - have some resources that you may find useful

[Meeting the needs of all children - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-the-needs-of-all-children-help-for-early-years-providers)

and

[Birth To 5 Matters – Guidance by the sector, for the sector](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/birth-to-5-matters-guidance-by-the-sector-for-the-sector)