

## **DfE consultation on reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage Reforms: A response from the Special Educational Consortium**

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership includes the voluntary and community sector, education providers and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, the SEN legal framework, exclusions and alternative provision.

SEC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the reforms to the EYFS. There are aspects of the changes with which SEC is content. These include:

- *People and communities becoming Past and Present*
- *The world becoming People, culture and communities and The natural world*
- *Technology, as a standalone, is removed; and*
- *Expressive arts and design becoming Creating with materials; and Being imaginative and expressive*

SEC welcomes more extended text introducing the educational programme for each of the seven areas of learning. However, there is no reference, in any of the educational programmes, to the Equality Act and the requirement to make reasonable adjustments for young disabled children, or to the requirement on settings to have regard to the Code of Practice and make special educational provision to meet a child's needs. These duties need to be properly reflected in the educational programmes, and referred to in a way that makes them part of the everyday experience of every setting.

We have made more specific comments on the different sections, below.

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## **Communication and language:**

The educational programme for communication and language needs a broader reference to communication and all the ways in which communication develops and can be supported. There should be specific reference to the use of sign and symbol communication systems for young children who do not yet have spoken language. Supporting communication in all its forms is key to avoiding the frustrations of a young child who is unable to communicate their needs and wishes. Such frustrations readily translate into behaviours that are more difficult to manage, such as biting.

## **ELG: Listening, attention and understanding:**

In merging *Understanding* with *listening and attention*, there has been a loss of focus on understanding. A key element of understanding, *following instructions involving several ideas or actions* has been removed, yet this is a really simple goal against which to assess.

*Speaking*: the proposed ELG for speaking narrows down the bigger goals of *expressing themselves effectively, connecting ideas and events* to a focus on the more mechanical *making use of conjunctions, and using recently introduced vocabulary* (twice). Whilst this might be simpler to assess, it does not reflect the range of ways in which young children express themselves.

## **Personal, social emotional development:**

The proposed educational programme for personal, social and emotional development should make proper reference to the need to understand patterns and drivers of children's behaviour, in order to support next steps in developing management of their own behaviour. Without this, the surface features of behaviour will be addressed, symptomatically, rather than the underlying causes. Settings need a different response to a child whose frustration arises from an inability to communicate and a child who has not grasped the underlying rules in a setting.

SEC welcomes the recognition of the importance of attachment, and the reference to attachment in the *Building Relationships* ELG. However, the concept needs a brief explanation here. A more extensive explanation would helpfully be included in the revised Development Matters.

It makes good sense to include *managing hygiene and personal needs* within PSED, with a focus on supporting children's growing independence. This would be a good point to make reference to managing the medical needs of young children and the reasonable adjustments that may need to be made, for example, staff volunteering to be trained in using an epipen.

ELG *Self-regulation*: we recognise the importance of self-regulation and welcome the linkage to later progress and outcomes. However, the development of self-regulation is narrowed down to *wait for what they want and control immediate impulses*. This could rather miss the point and encourage practitioners to focus on these features at the expense of recognising a range of

ways in which a child is developing self-regulation. There are also other features of immediate impulses that we would want to encourage, for example, we would want to encourage children's curiosity. In this context, controlling immediate impulses could also be counter-productive.

### **Specific areas of learning:**

*Writing* ELGs expects most letters have to be 'correctly formed'. This only focuses on the surface features of writing, not picking up on whether, for example, children can explain what they have written in a way that shows they are seeking to convey meaningful ideas.

### **Mathematics:**

We do not support the proposal to omit *Space, shape and measures* from the ELGs. The fact that there is a reference to them in the educational programme does not make up for their omission from the ELGs. The ELGs set out a sample of the key features of early learning and development; they need to reflect the most important features. *Space, shape and measures* are a key part of children's understanding of order in the world around them and a key element in developing vocabulary to describe this order.

### **Expressive arts and design:**

ELG, *Creating with materials: sharing their creations* is accompanied by *children explaining the process they have used*, which is fine, but doesn't encourage a discussion of the objects, stories or ideas captured in their creation or what they are trying to 'express'. We suggest adding this in.

### **Other considerations:**

#### **Evaluation of pilot:**

We are aware that those who piloted the revised ELGs thought they were clearer. The point we make, above, is that some aspects of early learning and development have been over-simplified in the revised ELGs; at the same time, bigger ideas have been sacrificed. There may be a wider range of opinions about their achievement, but they do provide for a wider range of ways in which young children can demonstrate progress. That is an important consideration for young disabled children and young children with SEN.

We are also aware that some of those involved in the pilot judged that the revised ELGs had reduced workload, with less assessment and evidence gathering and more time spent with children. We think this could be achieved with supporting materials and exemplification, which practitioners asked for anyway.

Some felt moderation still important to establish and maintain consistency, and to accommodate 'alternative views'. Our view is that moderation is key to consistency; it is also a key trigger for the professional discussion that enables practitioners to reflect on their practice, to hear about that of others and to refine their judgements about children's progress, learning and development. Moderation should be retained for all these reasons.

### **Our wider concerns**

Our wider concerns are that, in some important respects, the proposed changes reduce a number of the ELGs to a few surface features that represent an over-simplification of the underlying skills and talents of young children. These demonstrable, developing skills need to be understood within a broad framework of child development that supports practitioners in understanding where a child is in their learning and development and therefore what the practitioner can expect to see developing next. For the practitioner, this needs to be understood alongside a wide range of ways in which to support those next steps. To support these purposes, Development Matters is key. It will be important that the revised Development Matters is made available for a period of consultation.

We have concerns that the simplification of the ELGs may be more about the convenience of the workforce than about providing high quality early learning experiences for young children. The skills that are needed both to teach and assess the growing knowledge, skills and understanding of young children are fundamentally those of qualified teachers. So it is worth referring to the overview of research provided by Ofsted to inform the development of the new Education Inspection Framework:

*The importance of vision and instructional leadership can be found across phases. In the EPPE study of effective early years settings, for example, leadership was characterised by a clear vision, especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum. This vision was shared by all staff in the provider. This is facilitated by having a trained teacher as leader or manager of the EY setting (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006). What the content of the vision and focus of instructional leadership is will differ across phases. In early years, for example, there is a need for leaders to have a good understanding of the particular child development needs at this stage. Leaders in early years typically understand and emphasise the importance of both formal teaching and play, and make sure that early literacy and mathematics learning lie at the heart of practice and development, and that teachers have the knowledge and professional development to teach across these areas (Ofsted, 2015; 2018b). They tend to have a strongly child-focused orientation, though in the most effective settings a focus on educational development predominates (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006).*

We would be happy to provide further information or to clarify anything in our response.

### **Philippa Stobbs:**

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