

Starting points when developing a curriculum for early years

This brief guide is intended to support early years teachers, practitioners and managers with the development of a curriculum for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It aims to provide starting points and further information and tools to support discussions within schools and settings.

History of early childhood curriculum

It is important to remember that the idea of a curriculum for early childhood is not a new concept but draws from previous work such as:

- England's strong legacy of early childhood pioneers such as Rachel and Margaret Macmillan, [Early Years Pioneers - Margaret and Rachel McMillan | Nursery World](#) and Susan Isaacs [Articles - The Foundation Stage Forum \(FSF\) - Home of Early Years Foundation Stage \(eyfs.info\)](#)
- Early examples of holistic early childhood frameworks such as the original Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage [2000-curriculum-guidance.pdf \(educationengland.org.uk\)](#) and Birth to 3 Matters
- Rich examples of early childhood frameworks from other nations such as Reggio Emilia (Italy) and Te Whariki (New Zealand)

In the UK, the first Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework that spanned birth to five years was launched in 2008 giving a set of common principles and commitments to quality – reinforcing the message that the early years is a phase of development in its own right. During later revisions of the EYFS, the prime and specific areas, and the Characteristics of Learning were introduced.

The concept of 'school readiness' became common from 2011 onwards, although it has often been unclear whether this is referring to 'preparing' children for the start of Reception or Year One.

The word 'curriculum' became common in Department for Education (DfE) references to early years from 2021 onwards, as has a focus on 'sequencing' and 'progression of learning'. It is up to providers (schools and settings) to decide what the curriculum looks like for their children.

Information provided by Department for Education around curriculum

The DfE are clear that educators should always start with the [early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) framework](#) which contains the educational programmes that sit under the seven areas of learning. These are high-level curriculum summaries that you must follow and work into a rich curriculum that meets the needs of the children.

The DfE have released guidance on planning a curriculum - [Curriculum planning - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](#) and a video about the EYFS and

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curriculum (see 3:07 onwards) - [Chapter 1 – Curriculum and the EYFS Profile under the new EYFS - Bing video](#)

Development Matters is used by many settings to help shape their curriculum - [Development Matters - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The EYFS (2021) states that “Development Matters, non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS, is available to support providers in their delivery of the EYFS learning and development requirements. As this document is non-statutory, Ofsted and inspectorates of independent schools will not have regard to it in carrying out inspections and it is up to providers to decide how they approach the curriculum.” (p7)

Development Matters can be thought of as ‘the floor not the sky’ – providers are encouraged to build their curriculum around it and to become more ambitious in setting out what children are to be enabled to learn

Other resources that may be helpful when considering your curriculum

The following articles and videos may be helpful when considering how to develop a curriculum in your school or setting:

[How to build your own curriculum - Julian Grenier | The Family Interview - Bing video](#)

[How to Build Your Own Early Years Curriculum | Family](#)

The simple path to your EYFS curriculum - <https://www.family.co/blog/simple-path-to-your-eyfs-curriculum>

Herts for learning article on questions to consider [Curriculum and pedagogy in the Early Years | HFL Education \(hertsforlearning.co.uk\)](#)

You may want to use the following prompt questions when starting to develop your curriculum as a staff team:

Who is going to take part in writing the curriculum?
What steps will you take to develop your curriculum?
What are the non-negotiable principles that you need to include?
What is your shared vision for your setting/early years?
What are the specific cultural issues of your settings or school community?
What is your local community like and how do you use it?
What experiences do your children bring to the setting and how will you build on this?

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What do you want children to learn, and which skills do you want them to develop and why?
What documents and approaches are you using to support the development of your curriculum?
How will you ensure that your curriculum contains a wide variety of experiences based on their differing needs and abilities and is inclusive?
How will your curriculum be broad and balanced?
How will you structure your curriculum?
How will you link your EYFS curriculum to what has happened before and what will happen after in KS1?
How will you share your curriculum with others, especially parents and carers, in an ongoing way?
Additional considerations for schools:
How will provision and practice connect to the school's curriculum?
How does the school structure its curriculum across all age groups?
What is the common language for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teaching? ➤ Learning? ➤ Continuous provision? ➤ Other

Explaining what the children will learn and when

It is helpful for practitioners to get into the habit of answering questions like the ones that follow in order to build their confidence in describing the curriculum on offer within the setting

Tell us about your children...

- What will they learn?
- What is their journey?
- Where will they start?
- Where will they get to?
- How are they going to do that?

What Ofsted say about their approach to inspecting curriculum in the EYFS

[Early years inspection handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) states that ‘Inspectors will evaluate evidence of the impact of the curriculum, including on the most disadvantaged children’ (72)

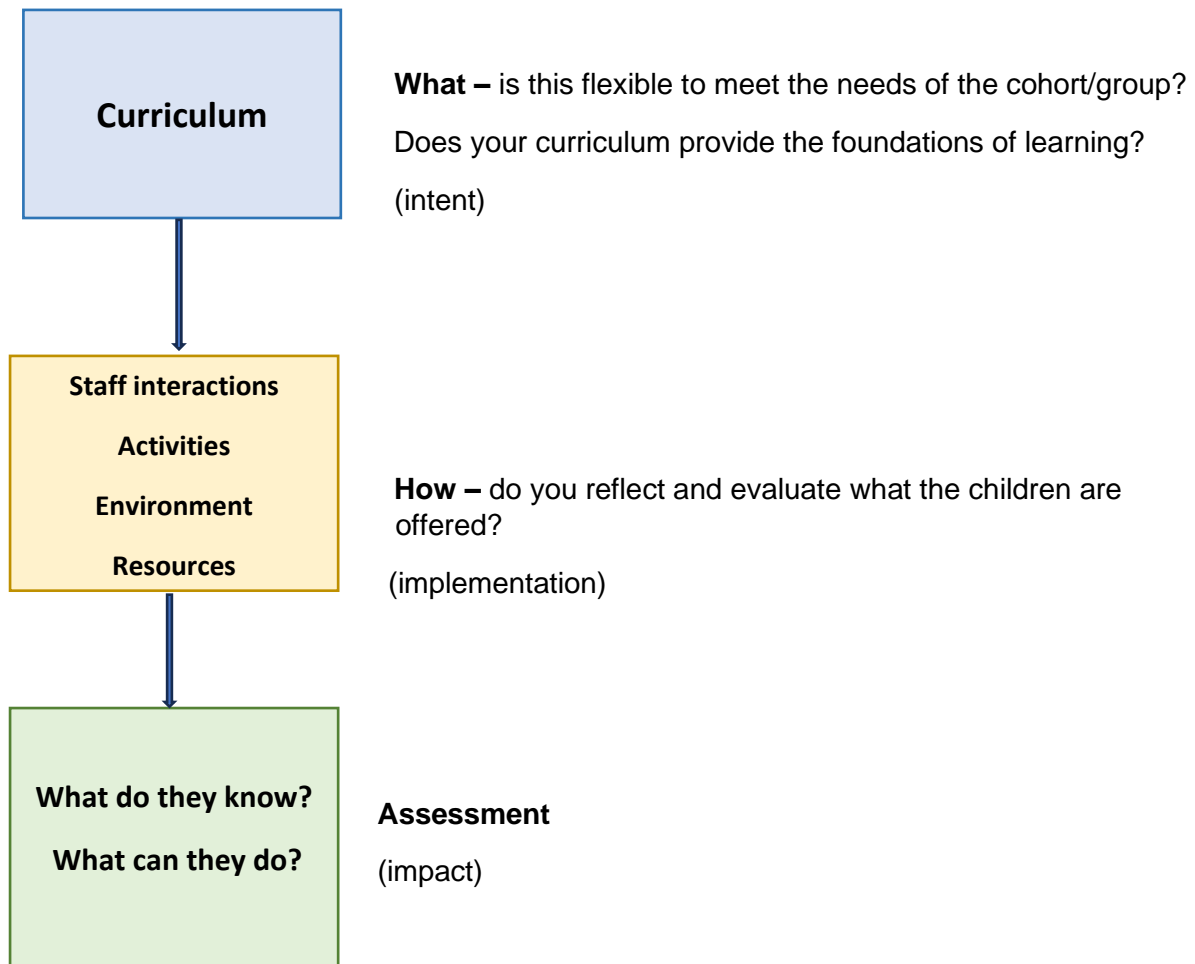
[School inspection handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) – references curriculum several times in the grade descriptors for early years (450 onwards).

Read [Amanda Spielman’s speech at the Big Conversation, 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Key points from Amanda Spielman at Ofsted’s Big Conversation meetings in 2023:

- Curriculum is the WHAT not the HOW
- Providers need to be clear what their curriculum looks like and how it evidences and delivers on the EYFS
- Ofsted, through talking with children and practitioners, will want to know what it is like for a typical child in a setting

The three i-s and curriculum:



Evaluating the impact of the early years curriculum

The following questions may be helpful when evaluating your curriculum:

How and when will you review the effectiveness of your curriculum and who will be involved?
What is it like to be a child in this school/setting?
How are you making it as easy as possible for a child to learn?
What have the children learnt (and remembered)?
What do the following people say about the curriculum – leaders, Head teacher, practitioners, parents, children?
What firsts do children experience through your curriculum?

Transition to Year One

The Early Years Team have developed guidance which will help school based subject leaders to consider what their specialist subject looks like in early years, how key knowledge and skills are taught and what progression through these may look like –

[Support for Childminders, Early Years and Childcare Provision | Cumberland Council](#)

Staff may also find the transition toolkit useful for children moving into year 1 but also for children starting school, transition for children with SEND and ideas for parents

[Support for Childminders, Early Years and Childcare Provision | Cumberland Council](#)

Further examples of curriculum designs

The following resources may support and inspire you in your curriculum development:

Froebel Trust: curriculum making with young children

[Froebel-Trust-PDF-Research-Highlight-Book-Three.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

Welsh Curriculum for non- maintained nursery settings

[A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

Birth to 5 Matters; non-statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage:
[Birth To 5 Matters – Guidance by the sector, for the sector](#)

Sheringham Nursery Curriculum and Assessment policy (2021)
[SNSCC-Curriculum-Overview-and-Curricular-Goals-Sep-21-update.pdf \(sheringham-nur.org.uk\)](#)

Education Endowment Fund Toolkit support and resources for early years
[Evidence for the early years | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

Centre for Early Childhood research reports - [Research - Centre for Early Childhood](#)

Putting the EYFS Curriculum into Practice (book) by Julien Grenier

Disclaimer: Please note that this guidance does not specify any particular models to use; where reference to any framework has been made, this is purely to provide an example for illustrative purposes.