

What is The Early Years Foundation Stage?

In September 2008 the government launched a new framework for children from birth to five entitled 'The Early Years Foundation Stage'. Many parents in my Nursery School have asked, 'What is it and how will it affect my child? In this article, I will try to give you an overview. If you would like more detailed information about it, please look on the Ofsted website.

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework sets the standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is the 31st of August following their fifth birthday. It is against this framework that all childcare settings are now inspected by Ofsted, the government regulators.

The main aim of the Early Years Foundation Stage is to help each child to achieve the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters': to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being.

In order to achieve these five outcomes, the Early Years Foundation Stage has brought together and replaced the three separate pre-existing frameworks for child care settings which were the National Standards for the under 8s Daycare and Childminding, Birth to Three Matters and The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is based on four themes: a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development. A unique child - we recognise that children are competent learners from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. Positive relationships - we recognise that children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person. Enabling environments - we recognise that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning. Learning and development - we recognise that children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and that all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

These four themes are woven and developed through six areas of learning which are Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem-solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the world; Physical Development and Creative Development.

These areas of learning are not new as they formed the basis of the original Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance. The only title change is 'mathematical development' which is now called 'Problem-solving, Reasoning and Numeracy' but there have been a few amendments to the curriculum within these six areas in the light of research and consultation.

It will take some time for the revised system to be fully operational and implemented as there were delays with the publication of some of the guidance, but all childcare settings will be using the Early Years Foundation Stage as their bible.

I believe that now this has been launched things have almost gone full circle. Once again the focus in early years is on play and identifying children's progress and the way forward for each individual child through observation of and participation in their play: a holistic approach with a well balanced combination of child led and adult led activities, bringing about the best possible outcomes for your child.

Maybe you can remember going to playgroup or nursery yourself and having lots of fun in the sandpit, playing with water, weighing and measuring, listening to stories, singing nursery rhymes, dressing up, role play, playing with playdough, having fun with art and craft and exploring for creepy crawlies under flower pots. This approach is back in abundance. The main difference now is that childminders, nursery staff and reception teachers will be required to provide a record of your child's progress within a learning journey: the object being to ensure that your child is progressing well in all six areas of learning that have been identified as crucial to the wellbeing of the whole child.

The practitioner will 'look, listen and note,' as your child plays. The observation process is designed to find out about the needs of your child, to identify what they're interested in and what they can do. Observations will record how your child responds to different situations and highlight their achievements or need for further support. This process will help practitioners to get to know your child better, and through these observations develop a deeper understanding of child development. It will enable practitioners to plan and design activities best suited to your child. Practitioners will be asking themselves how they are going to help your child to move forward, what resources they will need to achieve this and how will they record the progress.

Practitioners have the freedom to devise their own system of record keeping and this could include a written record, a photograph, a sound recording or even a drawing or collage that your child has created. All settings and practitioners will be encouraged to develop a good rapport with parents and carers. There will be an ongoing dialogue between the practitioner and the parents, focusing on the child's learning journey towards the learning goals, working together for the benefit of your child.

This system has been designed to ensure that no child slips through the net. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage states that:

'It is crucial for their future success that children's earliest experiences help to build a secure foundation for learning throughout their school years and beyond.'

Meeting the individual needs of all children is at the heart of the newly introduced Early Years Foundation Stage with practitioners encouraged to deliver personalised learning, development and care to help children have the best possible start in life. You as a parent or carer will be encouraged to work closely with your chosen setting to support your child along the learning journey so that really secure foundations are established.

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