

Daycare Trust Response to the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage

September 2010

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for high quality, accessible, affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We undertake research, campaign on childcare issues, work with providers in different types of early years' settings, as well as providing information for parents and carers. Our research with parents and providers give a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of issues facing these groups and our response to the review of the Early Childhood Foundation Stage (EYFS) draws from this evidence¹.

Many independent studies show that young children who spent time in nurseries and in other high quality early years settings have better social and learning outcomes at school and in later life – but only if these settings provide a good quality service. The EYFS as a quality framework is central to improving the social and learning outcomes of England's children.

Daycare Trust supports the aims of the EYFS as a single quality framework and believes that its implementation has substantially improved the quality of early childhood education in England. We believe that the broad aims and principles and welfare requirements of EYFS should remain as a universal framework, but there is scope for making the learning and development requirements more flexible for settings where children may spend a comparatively small part of their day. We also recommend improvements in the assessment arrangements in order to promote the earlier identification of children encountering learning or social difficulties. We also believe changes could be made to improve its usefulness for parents, so that the framework might become a tool by which parents identify high quality settings and make choices about the best provision for their child.

Parental views of EYFS

Daycare Trust works closely with parents and carers. We supported the Department for Education to hold a workshop with parents on 23 September to discuss their views on EYFS. This response draws on the comments made at that workshop, as well as the views of parents gathered from our Parent Network, information services and previous research. We believe that almost all most parents want the early years sector to be regulated. In qualitative research

¹ Daycare Trust surveys and other research are available online www.daycaretrust.org.uk

undertaken by Daycare Trust, parents stated that quality control regulations enabled parents to trust early years settings to protect and nurture their children.

While parents do want early years settings to be regulated, our research shows that parents lack accurate information about the EYFS. They may be aware of the EYFS profile and may have picked up on misconceptions about the EYFS as a result of press coverage.

Although not all parents may not be aware of the content and role of the EYFS, our research shows that parents do have clear ideas about what comprises 'quality'. Daycare Trust has recently undertaken research about parents' understandings of quality early years provision². This showed that parents generally support a single national quality framework and oppose too much provider autonomy as might result in lower standards of care.

Our research shows that some parents use Ofsted reports before choosing early years provision. Research carried out by Daycare Trust for the London Early Years Foundation (a social enterprise with 20 nurseries across London) suggested that 50.2 per cent of the sample of parents had consulted Ofsted reports. We believe that awareness and use of Ofsted reports is lower for parents choosing an early years setting than it is for schools, a situation which could be improved with greater promotion and easier to access reports.

Despite the use of Ofsted reports by some parents, awareness about the content of the EYFS, its statutory status and role as a benchmark of quality remains low among parents. Daycare Trust suggests that the Department for Education could produce a short user-friendly parent summary of the EYFS. Such a guide would help parents choose early years provision as it would provide a summary of what high quality looks like, as well as supporting parents' understanding of how early years settings support child development.

While most parents broadly support the welfare and learning and development guidelines, they felt that some of the early learning goals were inappropriate. Some parents believed that too much emphasis was placed on children attaining these goals. Many parents also want better feedback on their child's cognitive, social and emotional development.

Scope of the Framework

Since the EYFS framework and practice guidance aims to ensure quality provision, Daycare Trust believes that its broad aims and principles and welfare requirements should apply to all early years providers. All settings defined as early years providers in the Childcare Act 2006 should be required uphold the broad aims and welfare requirements of the EYFS, including the new 3-18 academies. Daycare Trust recommends that legislation and regulations should be amended to ensure that academies are covered by a future EYFS.

Many early years providers are childminders, working by themselves, with Department for Education statistics suggesting that 355,000 English children were cared for by a childminder in

² Daycare Trust (2010, forthcoming) Parents' Views of Childcare Quality, London: Daycare Trust

2008. There has been some debate about whether childminders should be obliged to comply with the full EYFS. Daycare Trust believes that it is essential that childminders comply with all the requirements of the EYFS as young children will often spend most of their waking day with a childminder. It is, therefore, important that they are cared for within a stimulating and safe environment. This view is also held by the National Childminding Association, and we support its efforts to professionalise the childminding workforce, and for it to be seen as delivering high quality early years education in exactly the same way as group settings. Moreover, evidence from Ofsted shows that more registered childminders than ever are achieving good or outstanding grades in their inspections.

While the broad aims and welfare requirements should be universal, we believe that there is potential for tailoring some of the learning and development aspects of the guidance according to the setting and the length of time that a child spends in a particular setting. In particular, we think there is potential for reducing the breadth of the education programme for after-school settings where a child may spend a comparatively small part of the day. We note that for some settings, such as open access adventure playgrounds, there is variation across the UK as to whether they should comply with the EYFS. The review offers the opportunity to define and clarify what settings comprise early years' providers.

Broad aims and principles of the EYFS

Daycare Trust supports the broad aims and principles of EYFS. We believe that these broad aims and principles should explicitly support the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (being healthy, staying safe, enjoyment and achievement, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being). The broad aims and principles of the EYFS should also explicitly enshrine learning through free and structured play. Our work with parents suggests that most of them support this principle.

We also feel that the broad aims and principles of the EYFS should give explicit support to the principle of early intervention and the role of early years services in identifying and supporting children encountering learning, health or social difficulties.

We also believe that if providers are receiving funding from Government, including for the 2, 3 and 4 year old places, then they should be required to demonstrate that they are following the EYFS, and making efforts to improve the quality of their setting.

Learning and development requirements

Daycare Trust broadly supports a national framework that outlines an educational programme for young children and sets out early learning goals. A nationally agreed educational programme enables consistency and quality and the early learning goals provide a benchmark for providers and parents. However, we feel that there are too many early learning goals, a view also supported by our research with parents of young children. There is also significant overlap between some of the learning and development requirements, as well as the 'Organisation' requirements in the welfare section. Daycare Trust recommends a reduction in the overall number of goals. Additionally, we would like to see a review in the communication, language

and literacy goals. It should be noted that most children do not attain all the latter goals because not all of them are developmentally appropriate. We recommend that goals about writing for different purposes and using punctuation be dropped as early learning goals.

We think there is there is potential for reducing the breadth of the education programme for after-school and sessional play settings where a child may spend a comparatively small part of the day. For example, after-school settings could be exempted from the requirement to support writing, as a young child attending an after-school club will also be attending school.

Daycare Trust works with parents who have disabled children and is committed to improving access to quality early years provision for these children. We note that neither the statutory guidance, nor the good practice material makes it clear how the needs of children with special educational needs (or English as an additional language) should be met through the six areas of learning.

Over the last 20 years, England's population has grown increasingly diverse in relation to the ethno-linguistic background of families. By January 2010 some 16 per cent of primary school children spoke a language other than English at home. Research shows that children who can maintain and develop their home language(s) often have a cognitive advantage.³ Home language development is also important for families who may return to their countries of origin. Yet some parents are unwilling to support their child's learning in a language other than English. We would like to support for bilingualism embedded in the learning and development requirements, rather than in the welfare section.

Given growing levels of obesity, we feel that the educational programme and early learning goals should enable children to start understanding what are healthy foods, and that there should be food and nutritional standards included in the EYFS. Our work with parents suggests that there is widespread parental support for explicit nutritional standards in the EYFS. Daycare Trust is a member of the Advisory Board on Food and Nutrition in Early Years, and welcome the thorough investigation that the Board is undertaking.

Assessment arrangements

Daycare Trust supports formative assessment of young children as we believe it enables providers to personalise learning activities, as well as identify issues of concern. Formative assessment enables the early identification of special and additional educational needs or other social problems that may impact on children's welfare and development. We see formative assessment as an essential component of early intervention. We support the aims of *Look, Listen and Note* as a formative assessment tool, but feel that *Look, Listen and Note* guidance in the EYFS practice guidance is rather unwieldy. We recommend that formative assessment guidelines should be redrafted to make them more user-friendly.

³ Bialystock E, Luk, G and Kwan E (2005) 'Bilingualism, Biliteracy and Learning to Read' in *Scientific Studies of Reading* Vol 9 (1): 43-61

We would also like to see formative assessment supporting the improved identification of children who have special or additional educational needs, something that *Look, Listen and Note* does not do well.

We have some concerns about the EYFS profile as a summative assessment tool. We believe that the EYFS profile is an overlong document and its judgements are not understood by parents. The assessment criteria in do not link into Key Stage One teaching and assessment. We believe that the summative end of EYFS profile should combined with a baseline assessment in school at the start of Key Stage One and involve early years and Key Stage One teachers. This would reduce replication between EYFS profile and Key Stage One baseline assessments, which may take place at fairly close succession.

Our work with parents suggests that many of them would appreciate better feedback on their child's social, emotional and cognitive development. In order to promote better parent feedback, we recommend that the single end of EYFS profile should be replaced with a *short* annual report to parents, in a format that is clear to them. We would like to see this annual report support greater parental involvement in children's early learning and the EYFS oblige at least an annual discussion about their child's development. These arrangements would also overcome the problem of transition which many children make between an early years setting such as a nursery, and reception class, which means that in many cases the reception teacher responsible for the end of EYFS profile is only basing it on their knowledge of the child during their time in reception class, having received no information from the earlier setting. If an annual report was available from a previous setting, this could be passed to reception classes to inform their understanding of the child's current and future development needs.

Welfare requirements

Daycare Trust supports the welfare requirements and believes that they must apply to all settings. While we support most of the specific legal requirements, we feel that some areas need improvement, namely:

Staff qualifications and workforce development: Much research, including the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project shows that only the highest quality childcare will deliver improved educational and psycho-social outcomes for children, and that the quality of childcare is strongly positively correlated with the qualifications level of staff⁴. There have been steady improvements in the levels of qualifications held by the early years' workforce since 2000. Department for Education survey data indicates that 66 per cent of the overall early years workforce was qualified at Level Three or above in 2008. However, 13 per cent of the overall early years' workforce and 34 per cent of childminders have no qualifications.

The EYFS target of 50 per cent of staff to be qualified at Level Two is lowering the overall bar, rather than raising it. We would like to see this target amended to ensure that by 2014 90 per cent of staff hold qualifications at Level Two or above and 100 per cent by 2016. We would also

⁴ Sylva K and Roberts F (2009) 'Quality in early childhood education: evidence for long-term effects' in Pugh G and Duffy B (eds) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, London: Sage Publications

like to see a specific legal requirement for staff who hold no qualifications or are qualified below Level Two, to show they are taking steps to improve their level of qualifications in both childcare and literacy and numeracy. There should be a specific legal requirement for childminders who hold no childcare qualifications to attend an approved training course prior to registration. Additionally, we would like to see the EYFS statutory framework support the acquisition of higher level qualifications by all staff.

Supervision levels: Daycare Trust believes that the adult to child ratios for children over three (1:13) and children in reception classes in schools (1:30) are unworkable, unsafe and compromise the quality of early years education. A 1:13 level does not allow for emergencies, meetings and staff breaks and at some times of the day staff will be supervising many more than 13 children. Daycare Trust recommends a 1:8 adult to child ratio for three year olds and a 1:10 adult to child ratio for reception classes, keeping the 1:30 ratio for reception classes for qualified teachers only.

Outdoor space: While we believe that all day nurseries should have an outdoor play area, not all childminders, particularly in cities, may have an outdoor play area. However, where a childminder has no outdoor play area, there needs to be a nearby playground that is safe, enclosed and suitable for young children.

Organisation: some of the requirements cited in this section would be better placed in the learning and development requirements.

Documentation: Daycare Trust suggest that the Department for Education develops a single, simple form to be used in all early years settings in order to collect the required information about children. We would suggest that information about children's home language(s) is collected. A single, national form would also enable the better collection of data about special educational needs. Such a form could be transferred with a child to a new setting if children move.

The format and accessibility of the statutory guidance, practice guidance and other supporting material

Daycare Trust believes that the format of the statutory guidance, practice guidance and other supporting material could be improved. The documents need to better reflect their aims and also their intended audience. The statutory guidance document is too long and at times there is no clear distinction in it between legal requirements and good practice recommendations.

We are also concerned that there little accessible training material on the EYFS targeted at providers who have lower level qualifications or none at all. The EYFS training material on the National Strategies site is not targeted at this group, is not always written in plain English, and is difficult to navigate. We recommend that the EYFS review critically examines training material.

Contents of practice guidance

We feel that partnership between early years providers, parents and other professionals such as health visitors is an essential principal of the EYFS. Yet there is very little information in the practice guidance about how strong partnerships can be achieved and how early years settings can help parents support their children's learning.

Workforce perceptions of EYFS

We acknowledge that some early years providers have expressed concerns about the demands of complying with the EYFS and the EYFS Profile. However, Daycare Trust work with early years providers suggests that since the EYFS was introduced, providers are now familiar with it and there is now support for it. The 2010 London Childcare Providers' Survey, showed that 70 per cent of respondents believed that the EYFS had a positive impact on childcare. Between 2009 and 2010 there was a 49 per cent fall in the proportion of London early years providers who believed that implementing the EYFS was an issue for them⁵. Of those who stated that implementing the EYFS was an issue for them, just over half felt that a lack of time was their major concern relating to the EYFS.

We believe that there is little evidence to show that childminders are leaving the profession as a consequence of the EYFS, the EYFS Profile or Ofsted inspections. However, very major change to the EYFS, or further reviews of the EYFS in the immediate future have the potential to damage workforce morale.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Daycare Trust welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review and believe that it is right that the EYFS is reviewed following its implementation in 2008. However as this response and many others argue, it would be a mistake to make radical changes to the EYFS framework, when the vast majority of the sector believes that it is working well and has contributed to raised standards in early education and care. The changes we have suggested relate mainly to improvements in the way that parents can use and benefit from EYFS. We believe that these changes would improve the legitimacy and use of EYFS, and would further help drive improvements in quality.

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⁵ Daycare Trust (2010) London Childcare Providers Survey, London: Daycare Trust