

Executive Summary

The
Hundred
Review

Teaching Four & Five Year Olds: The Hundred Review of the Reception Year in England



Early Excellence
Centre for Inspirational
Learning

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Introduction by Liz Marsden

The Reception Year (YR) has a unique and crucial role in primary education. At Early Excellence we work with practitioners in this highly specialist year group to develop, share and embed effective practice that strengthens the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on good outcomes for children.

Through The Hundred Review, we aimed to give practitioners an opportunity to contribute to the current national policy debate about YR. The response has been incredible, with over four thousand practitioners taking part through our focus groups, visits and survey. We are grateful that so many have given their time and shared their views and expertise with us. Particular thanks go to the report authors, my colleagues Jan Dubiel and Denise Kilner, our expert panel and colleagues at CREC, who provided a review of evidence of effective pedagogic practice.

Taken together, The Hundred Review represents the biggest ever listening and learning exercise focused on Reception. We have gained valuable insights into how effective YR practice works and explored the challenges, tensions and pressures that practitioners face.

We have found broad agreement about the purpose of YR to engender children's love of learning and successfully acquire basic skills in the Prime Areas of Learning and Development, Literacy and Maths. There is overwhelming support for YR to remain part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework, and we will now be making the case for this to the Government and other policy makers.

Achieving an effective balance between child-initiated and adult-directed approaches, and differentiating these for children's level of development, is crucially important for effective teaching and good outcomes. So too is the quality and nature of the indoor and outdoor learning environment.

Leadership is a key theme, and we settled on a recommendation that in every school, a member of the Senior Leadership Team should have specific responsibility for supporting YR. Other major themes that we explored, and around which we make recommendations, include assessment, transition, how diverse needs are supported in YR, and the importance of starting age.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to The Hundred Review so far. Our commitment to you now, is to take this work forward in two directions. Firstly, to work with you to share all the good practice that The Hundred Review has collected. Secondly, to share this report and your views with all those who influence YR, including the government, Ofsted, multi-academy trusts, and other stakeholders.

Early Excellence will always make the case for policy change to be informed by evidence and by practitioners.

Please share The Hundred Review findings and together we can inform the future of YR.



Liz Marsden
Founder & CEO, Early Excellence



Purpose of The Hundred Review

(1 to 2.3)

1. The explicit aims of The Hundred Review were to draw upon specific YR expertise and knowledge to establish an authoritative and comprehensive picture of current YR practice and provision and to identify and then explore the issues, tensions and confusions that currently exist. As a wide ranging review that would draw from a series of evidence strands, (see 3 to 5) its aim was to provide a clear and detailed picture that could and should inform a broader discussion of the issues involved.

2. The Hundred Review sought to answer three specific questions:

- 2.1. How are good outcomes secured in YR?
- 2.2. What is effective teaching in YR and how do we know?
- 2.3. What prevents or secures progress and attainment in YR?

Evidence Strands

(3 to 5)

3. The evidence that informed the findings of The Hundred Review was drawn from the following sources:

- 3.1. An online survey, active from 23/01/17 to 24/02/17, which consisted of 69 questions, requiring both quantitative and qualitative responses. There were a total of 4250 responses to the survey.
- 3.2. A series of national Focus Groups, held across England between 26/01/17 and 09/02/17, in which the following three questions formed the basis of discussion with participants:
 - Do you believe that the EYFS Framework is appropriate for all Reception aged children? If so why, and if not why not?
 - What do you think is the purpose of the YR?
 - What (if any) are the challenges of teaching in YR?

4. A total number of 44 schools with one or more Reception classes were visited by members of the Early Excellence Curriculum Team between 12/01/17 and 01/03/17. These visits consisted of:

- An interview with the Headteacher/Senior Leader
- A tour of YR provision
- Interview(s) with YR Practitioner(s)

5. A review of academic and research material, designed to:

- Explore and critique the concepts of school readiness and schoolification
- Evaluate research evidence about current YR practice, provision and outcomes
- Evaluate national and international evidence (from current neuro-scientific, child development and pedagogic research) that identifies those pedagogical approaches which secure the best outcomes for children of Reception age
- Identify the most appropriate long term learning outcomes for children of Reception age
- Set out broad conclusions from the research review on the most significant evidence for appropriate outcomes and effective pedagogical approaches in YR

Findings

(6 to 53)

The purpose of YR

6. Research indicates that there are key outcomes in YR that identify the likelihood of children's long term success.
7. There is debate about the meaning, use and usefulness of terms such as 'school readiness' and 'schoolification'.
8. There is a strong commitment from YR Practitioners, Teachers and School Leaders to ensuring that YR supports children to successfully acquire basic skills as represented by the Prime Areas of Learning and Development, Literacy and Maths (EYFS Framework).
9. Survey evidence demonstrated an emphasis on the importance of children's learning behaviours as represented by the Characteristics of Effective Learning (EYFS Framework).
10. There is a strong belief amongst YR Practitioners, Teachers and School Leaders that an important part of the purpose of YR should be to engender young children's love of learning.
11. A key element of the purpose of YR is to induct children into the culture of school and for the school to form effective relationships with children's parents/carers.

What teaching and learning look like in YR

12. There is a commitment amongst YR Practitioners and School Leaders to ensuring that the Prime Areas of Learning and Development are given appropriate status within YR classes. This is echoed in current research which identifies this as critical to children's learning, development and long term outcomes.

13. All YR classes within the Review provide focused Mathematics, Literacy and Phonics sessions as part of the daily routine.



14. YR Practitioners deliver the EYFS Statutory Framework requirements through a mix of child-initiated and adult-directed approaches and differentiate these for children's level of development. There are concerns that achieving an effective balance between these approaches can be a challenge and this can at times impact detrimentally on effectiveness and outcomes.

15. The quality and nature of indoor and outdoor learning environments are seen as central to effective practice and good outcomes in Reception as these provide the breadth of opportunity necessary to ensure that all aspects of the statutory EYFS are addressed appropriately.

16. The great majority of schools visited had established Continuous Provision, accessed by children on a daily basis, thereby providing opportunities for establishing a balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities. Although the use of Continuous Provision effectively supported child-initiated learning across all schools visited, there was less evidence of it being used effectively for adult-supported and adult-directed learning.

17. Alongside Continuous Provision, the majority of schools visited had a range of activities set-up for children to do independently, often focused on Literacy and Mathematics. This appears to be indicative of one of the confusions regarding effective YR practice: the relationship between different kinds of teaching approaches.

18. The Review found widespread agreement that an understanding of the importance and impact of the adult's role is pivotal in providing the most effective YR practice, although there are differing views regarding the critical elements of this role and how it creates an appropriate and optimum impact on learning and development.

What assessment and accountability look like in YR

19. YR Practitioners assess the aspects of children's learning and development as required by the EYFS Statutory Framework, although not all assess the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL).

20. Additional aspects also assessed included phonics, knowledge of key words (in both reading and writing) and the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement.

21. A large number of participants believe that the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement should be an integral part of the assessment and accountability system for YR.

22. The vast majority of practitioners use observational assessment to gather information about children and believe that this is how effective assessment should take place.

23. There was a broad consensus amongst all participants in The Hundred Review on the purpose of assessment as both a support for learning and teaching and in order to demonstrate children's progress.

24. Most respondents believed that the EYFS Profile should be retained as a statutory assessment at the end of YR, although many felt it should include other aspects of learning and development such as CoEL.

25. Just over a third of respondents supported the continued use of a Baseline Assessment.

How children's starting points impact on YR

26. Children entering YR with a low starting point in their learning and development, and those that have a summer birthdate, can often find it challenging to attain a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of YR, even when there is specific and targeted support in place. There is a strong belief that this needs to be recognised in approaches to accountability and measuring progress and these need to acknowledge relative achievement alongside attainment.



'Children deserve the best start to their education and as enthusiastic EY teachers with a secure understanding of this we are able to provide high quality provision which forms the building blocks for learning that are essential for their school life. There is a buzz and excitement in EY which is not quite found anywhere else, it's unique. If we are not careful this may be lost.'

Emily Corner
YR/Y1 Teacher

27. For children entering Reception with starting points below age-related expectations, the key areas of concern were often the Prime Areas of Learning and Development.

28. Effective induction into the culture and ethos of YR, its expectation and routines, is critical in ensuring that children establish confidence and familiarity with the learning environment to support high quality learning and development. The development of familiarity and confidence should be prioritised within this initial induction period.

How the diverse needs of children are supported in YR

29. Support for children with Additional Needs/SEND is likely to be more effective when procedures are in place to identify specific needs prior to entry to YR. This early identification needs to be prioritised and fully supported by all EYFS settings that feed into YR classes.

30. There was a consensus amongst Review respondents that the EYFS Statutory Framework provides a supportive and protective framework for children who have additional needs and who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The flexibility of approach permitted within the EYFS Framework and its focus on the Prime Areas of Learning and Development and the CoEL enable practitioners to support the development of children with a diverse range of characteristics and needs.

31. In particular, an emphasis on the Prime Areas of PSSED and Communication and Language was considered to be critical in ensuring inclusive and supportive provision in YR.

32. In order to support effective provision and ensure good outcomes for children with SEND and EAL, stable Reception experience and immediate access to support were considered to be vital by both School Leaders and Practitioners.



How YR practice is supported by the EYFS Statutory Framework

33. The Hundred Review revealed unanimous support for retaining the EYFS Statutory Framework and ensuring that YR remains within it.

34. It is believed that the EYFS Statutory Framework is an holistic and valid document that effectively supports learning and teaching in YR.

35. There is strong support for the Prime Areas of Learning and the CoEL as the core elements of effective YR practice.

36. The Hundred Review revealed confusion regarding the status and best use of the (non-statutory) Development Matters age band statements.

37. There is concern about the pitch of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) for Literacy and Mathematics; whether the statements are at an appropriate level for the end of YR, and whether an over focusing on formal skills and knowledge detracts from supporting wider aspects of learning and development that support good outcomes in these curriculum areas.



How leadership impacts on YR

38. The presence of EYFS Leads on School Senior Leadership Teams was seen as an important indication of the value placed on YR within a school, and necessary to ensure that the uniqueness and pressures on YR were reflected and addressed within whole school policies and procedures.

39. There was a strong belief that Senior Leadership Teams need to fully understand the nature and purpose of YR, the relevant statutory documentation and be confident and conversant with the principles by which YR operates.

40. The need for Senior Leaders to be fully informed in order to ensure that the monitoring of learning and teaching in YR is appropriate and challenging was identified as a key issue by YR Teachers and Practitioners.

How transition affects YR

41. Transition into Reception

- In order to establish an effective transition into YR, it was strongly believed that this was best viewed as a process that emphasised continuity rather than a single event
- Funding and non-contact time need to be made available for YR staff to effectively address the range of issues associated with transition to YR from previous provision
- Information provided for Reception staff needs to present an holistic picture of the individual child and it is important that assessments, or indications of a child's level of development, are consistent and accurate



'I believe Reception encompasses the key factors that children require for a solid foundation in their well-being.'

James Wrigley
Teacher

42. Transition into Y1

- Effective transition to Y1 was considered to be dependent on transparent and professional relationships between YR and Y1 staff, specifically in terms of pedagogical approaches
- Part of the disconnect between YR and Y1 was believed to be due to the different statutory curricula that apply to the adjacent age groups, and the perceived shift from an emphasis on process as well as content in YR to a greater emphasis on the latter in Y1
- It was widely believed that, due to the age of the children and their developmental phase, the continuation of aspects of EYFS pedagogy, in particular the use of the Prime Areas and CoEL, would benefit children as they transferred to Y1 and hence support improved outcomes in KS1



The external pressures on YR

43. The contested concepts of ‘school readiness’ and ‘schoolification’ are considered to be responsible for some of the pressures experienced in YR.

44. It is believed that the DfE has a specific view on how YR should operate and this view is that YR should be more formalised in nature with an unbalanced emphasis on a purely didactic approach to teaching.

45. There is a greater awareness that Ofsted documentation is clear about the requirements for YR, although mythologies persist about what is and isn’t expected by inspection teams.

46. There is frequent misunderstanding demonstrated by parents about the nature and purpose of YR and its uniqueness within Primary, First and Infant Schools.

47. Within schools there is often a top down pressure on YR that attempts to move practice towards a more formal approach with a greater focus on Literacy and Mathematics outcomes.

48. There is evidence of misunderstanding of YR practice and provision, and a lack of awareness that a counter-intuitive approach to Literacy and Mathematics teaching is more likely to secure good outcomes.

How internal issues affect outcomes in YR

49. There are concerns regarding the amount of coverage expected in YR, especially for specific aspects of Literacy and Mathematics, and this often detracts from opportunities to support other areas of children's learning and development.

50. The issues of recording and tracking progress were also cited as creating internal pressures on YR practice.

51. Restrictions and cuts in funding were also identified as causes of pressure, notably through negative impacts on adult:child ratios and opportunities to engage in CPD.

52. There is confusion regarding the nature of YR practice and how this is perceived and understood; this has often resulted in YR Practitioners being uncertain about what is expected of them.

53. There is a lack of confidence in the understanding of some of the terminology used in YR and how this relates to effective practice. Words like 'play', 'teaching', 'formal/informal' and 'assessment' are subject to widely varying interpretation and there is a lack of agreement on their specific meaning in YR. This misunderstanding and lack of clarity often impacts on the quality of provision and the way it is perceived and evaluated.



'The holistic development of children in the Reception Year is vital.'

Chris Currie
Primary Head

Conclusions

(54 to 59)

54. There is a broad agreement amongst most YR Practitioners and School Leaders as to the purpose of the YR and the most developmentally appropriate outcomes for children in this year group. This is reflected in longitudinal research and international comparative studies for children of this age and provides a solid consensus on the aspirations for YR practice. There is overwhelming support for the current EYFS Statutory Framework and a deep commitment to ensure that the Reception Year remains an integral part of the EYFS.

55. The understanding of pedagogy and practice in YR and its uniqueness within a school environment is not always fully acknowledged at either national or local strategic levels. There is strong feeling amongst YR teachers and practitioners that pressures and tensions emanating from this lack of understanding can compromise effective YR practice and have a negative impact on outcomes for children.

56. The need for children to have a good knowledge and understanding of the skills required for successful Literacy and Mathematics outcomes is unanimously supported by YR Teachers and Practitioners. However, in order for children to attain good outcomes in Literacy and Mathematics, a range of other contributory knowledge, skills, experiences and learning behaviours are equally important, and successful outcomes in these two areas of learning are dependent on more than the acquisition of formal skills. This counter-intuitive approach to early Literacy and Mathematics is often misunderstood or its importance not acknowledged, with a negative effect on the very outcomes that are being worked towards.

57. While there is evidence of a good understanding of the purposes of assessment to support learning and enable accountability, there is often a tension with how this translates into school systems. This tension often revolves around which aspects of children's learning and development are assessed and whether the most significant and important aspects are recorded and summarised appropriately. There was a strong commitment to demonstrate progress in a way that reflects all aspects of children's learning and development.



58. There is widespread agreement about the importance of transition both into and out of YR, and an acknowledgement amongst Practitioners and School Leaders of the importance of continuity of provision, pedagogy and assessment across these transitions so as to avoid the consequences of dramatic changes in approach.

59. Despite the existence of the EYFS Statutory Framework and the Ofsted definition of teaching, there is widespread confusion regarding the expectations of YR practice and the nature of YR pedagogy, specifically:

- A lack of clarity and agreement exists regarding what constitutes effective teaching in YR classes, with different views on what this is and what this looks like in practice. This often undermines YR Practitioners' confidence in their own professionalism as educators
- There is often an unhelpful segregation and polarisation of different traditions and pedagogical approaches, partially responsible for confused expectations and inconsistent evaluation of practice.
- Differing interpretations of the educational terminology used in YR and a lack of agreed definitions, frequently result in inconsistencies and misunderstanding
- There is over emphasis and anxiety about what type of activity children are engaged with rather than evaluation of its effectiveness in supporting good outcomes
- Effective teaching in YR is a complex process, resulting from the experience of highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals enabled to act in a flexible and responsive way. Good outcomes for children are not achieved when teaching in YR is reduced to a simplistic, linear, cause and effect methodology, nor when YR practice is reliant on purely unstructured access to provision

Recommendations

(1 to 7)

The Hundred Review Report and Expert Panel makes the following recommendations:

1. In light of the overwhelming support from School Leaders and Teachers, coupled with the research evidence of effective and appropriate pedagogy for children of this age, the DfE should reaffirm its commitment to ensuring that YR remains an integral part of the EYFS.
2. In order to ensure that DfE policy is appropriately informed an advisory panel of recognised Early Years Experts that includes specialists in YR should be convened to meet regularly with the Secretary of State for Education, appropriate ministers and other national stakeholders.
3. Greater awareness needs to be made of the developmental processes that are required to secure competent Literacy and Mathematical skills and knowledge, and in particular how this is most effectively supported in YR.
4. To address some of the concerns regarding the GLD outcomes for the end of YR, an informed review of the 'pitch' of the ELGs for Literacy and Mathematics should be undertaken, in conjunction with an evaluation of the use and publication of national EYFS Profile data.
5. To fully acknowledge and understand the importance and impact of effective YR practice, a member of every Infant, First and Primary School's Senior Leadership Team should have specific responsibility for supporting and challenging YR. Where appropriate and necessary, CPD and peer support for Senior Leaders should be made available in order to facilitate this.

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6. The lack of clarity and consensus regarding key terminology in YR and its impact on and application to everyday practice needs to be addressed. A national symposium needs to be convened within which all stakeholders and representatives would define and agree the meaning of key terminology and its application to practice.
7. To support the clarity of terminology and consistency of effective practice, a suite of nationally recognised materials and case studies needs to be developed and published to support YR Teachers, School Leaders and stakeholders.



The Hundred Review Expert Panel

With thanks to our Expert Panel for their reflective and thoughtful participation in shaping the final recommendations of the report. It was a real privilege to work with so many committed and passionate Early Years Educators keen to work so intensely to defend what we know is right for children.

Rhio Ayeh-Kumi
Globe Primary School

Kate Beaumont
Seven Kings School

Cathy Bee
Royal Borough Greenwich LA

Elaine Bennett
Friars Primary School and Nursery

Lydia Cuddy-Gibbs
ARK Schools

Chris Currie
Dixons Allerton Academy

Solin Flash
Harris Primary Academy

Sally Hickman
Rutland LA

Sarah Mardell
West Earlham Infant and Nursery

Helen Moylett
Independent Consultant

Julia Norman
Wells Primary and Nursery School

Cassandra Williams
Adventure Learning Academy Trust

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About the Authors



Jan Dubiel, Early Excellence National Director
Jan Dubiel is the National Director at Early Excellence and works as part of the team to support Early Years practitioners and settings in all aspects of practice and provision. Having trained as an Early Years specialist, Jan worked as a Nursery, Reception and Year 1 teacher in schools across the country, leading teams as an Early Years Co-ordinator. Following roles as an Early Years Consultant and Senior Adviser, he was appointed by the then Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to lead on the management of the (Early Years) Foundation Stage Profile, and had national responsibility for its implementation and moderation, developing guidance and support materials and working at a strategic level with policy makers.

Jan has developed a national and international reputation as a conference speaker, consultant and trainer and he has written widely on different aspects of Early Years pedagogy. His first book 'Effective Assessment in the EYFS' was published by SAGE in 2014.



Denise Kilner, Early Excellence Curriculum Consultant
Denise is a highly experienced consultant, having worked with a Local Authority supporting schools and settings in their pursuit of quality practice. Denise has taught every age group across the EYFS and KS1. She was the EYFS Lead and Deputy Headteacher of a large infant school leading in curriculum development across the whole school. Denise then moved onto Headship and led a Nursery School for five years with an emphasis on developing children's thinking, undertaking educational research projects and initiating collaborative working with other settings and educationalists.

Early Excellence Northern Centre

The Old School, New Hey Road,
Outlane, Huddersfield HD3 3YJ.

Early Excellence London Centre

Eden House, Water Gardens Square,
Canada Water, London SE16 6RH.

Telephone 01422 311314

Email admin@earlyexcellence.com

www.earlyexcellence.com

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Download The Hundred Review full report at:
earlyexcellence.com/hundredreview



'We need a united and consistent ethos for education in the Early Years.'

Ellie Hayward
Reception Teacher



'Reception is the foundation for building lifelong skills.'

Georgie
Reception Teacher



'YR should be kept unique. Reception children need to learn through their interests.'

Ryan Deakin
EYU Teacher