

Extract from Amanda Spielman's Speech, HMCI Annual Report 2017

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But, despite the fact that most early years providers are doing well, our recent research into the Reception Year raised some questions about the suitability of the statutory framework under which they operate. The findings from that work do cast doubt on whether the early years foundation stage provides a strong enough curriculum, especially for the children who arrive at school further behind. Reception teachers also told us that the assessment framework, the EYFS profile, imposes unnecessary burdens on providers that detract from education itself. For this reason, I am pleased the government has committed to reviewing them both to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

It is worth my spending more time on the ['Bold beginnings' report](#), given the reaction to it from some corners of social media. Most feedback on the report has actually been very positive. But I was taken aback by some of the more extreme reactions. I happen to share the view of one education commentator, who said that the report is about as 'controversial as custard'.

Yes, we reported that the best schools – the ones in which disadvantaged children do best – place a strong emphasis on early reading, on having children sitting properly at a table when learning to write and on developing early number skills. But the report is also very clear that the Reception Year should be filled with opportunities for young children to play and to develop their social and personal skills. The dichotomy here is not about formal learning versus play. It is about understanding the different ways in which children acquire different kinds of knowledge and skills. You don't learn phonics quickly and efficiently by playing with soggy letters near the paddling pool. The sandpit is not a great place for early number work. But both the paddling pool and the sandpit are important in developing children's social interactions, their motor skills and their imaginations. That doesn't sound very controversial to me.