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HEADTEACHER UPDATE



BEST PRACTICE FOCUS 04 February 2021



The Battle for Reception

As reforms to the EYFS and the Early Learning Goals roll-out, tensions are high between early years professionals and government over the purpose of the Reception year. In this Best Practice Focus, **Neil Henty** sets out the challenges facing the Reception year and discusses some of the key tenets of best practice for ensuring that primary schools' Reception provision is effective, research-evidenced and puts children's needs at its heart

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Reception Year: Best practice and the challenges ahead

This has been an unprecedented time for children and school staff. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted learning and teaching and set new challenges in how to engage children and families and how best to deliver the curriculum.

In the months ahead, there will be greater challenges.

Challenge, of course, is nothing new to primary schools. Take the Reception year, as an example. It is the stage of a child's education that sits between worlds, in a state of constant transition. Non-compulsory and part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), classes are more often than not situated in primary schools and as such are subject to top-down governmental pressure.

What is the Reception year?

The Reception year involves a transition from the more pedagogically aligned foundation stage to the more academic national curriculum.

What should be a "best of both worlds" scenario needs careful attention and skilled teaching. It

also needs informed management from senior leadership teams who will need to have an understanding of the science of child development that underlies the EYFS and how this fits into and underpins the national curriculum, whatever the pressures elsewhere in the education system.

In short, headteachers and senior staff need to be champions of early childhood education (ECE) if children are going to have the best start to their education journeys.

In an ideal world, children who begin education in a nursery or pre-school setting would enjoy a smooth journey through their early years.

Despite many moving to a school setting for the last year of the EYFS, the change in venue should not, theoretically, change their experience. In fact, children should be unaware of any significant change in how they learn or are expected to learn.

However, the reality can often be different and this year has put Reception year teaching under even greater scrutiny.

"The transition between Reception and year 1 has really been

brought to the fore this year," according to Ruth Swailes, school improvement advisor and curriculum development consultant at Assure Education. "Schools (are) having to reflect more deeply, as children have not been in school for months and have missed a large chunk of their education.

"Some schools have realised that they need to take the children from where they are, and make a gradual shift towards key stage 1, others have expected the children to adapt to sitting, forward-facing, at desks all day and a more formal approach."

This *Best Practice Focus* has two parts. First, I will set out the challenges facing the Reception year, including the reforms to the EYFS and the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), the implications of these, the contentious debate about curriculum vs development, the tensions between ministers and the profession, and the problems that can be caused when primary school leaders do not understand early years education – often purely because of a lack of early years experience within senior leadership teams. I will then discuss some key

tenets of best practice for how primary schools can ensure their Reception year provision is effective, research-evidenced, and puts children's needs at its heart.

A bold beginning?

In 2017, a report was commissioned by Ofsted which delivered a "review of the curriculum". *Bold Beginnings: The Reception curriculum in a sample of good and outstanding primary schools* (Ofsted, 2017) aimed to provide "fresh insight into leaders' curriculum intentions, how these are implemented and the impact on outcomes for pupils", and to "shine a spotlight on the Reception Year and the extent to which a school's curriculum for four and five-year-olds prepares them for the rest of their education and beyond".

Among its conclusions, *Bold Beginnings* stated: "A good early education is the foundation for later success. For too many children, however, their Reception year is a missed opportunity that can leave them exposed to all the painful and unnecessary consequences of falling behind their peers."

Bold Beginnings is an insight into what Ofsted considers good practice in school Reception years and while it has much to commend it, the report proved controversial.

Early Education commissioned a review of the report, based on responses from the early years sector, including such groups as TACTYC, CREC and Early Excellence. While this response (2018) praised Ofsted's commitment to the importance of the Reception year and acknowledged that it identified "some good practice which is fully compatible with the EYFS", it went on to state: "However, it also makes some highly contentious recommendations which are unsupported by child development and research evidence."

Primarily, it was felt that *Bold Beginnings* contained an "underlying agenda of downward pressure from key stage 1 to narrow the early years curriculum" and that it "implicitly praises schools that have based their literacy and maths curriculum in the Reception year on national curriculum expectations for year 1". Such sentiments were also expressed in a shorter response to the Ofsted report by TACTYC, the Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC, 2017).

Curriculum or development?

And perhaps here lies the problem. For many in primary education, where deep knowledge of child development fades from the national curriculum, and where EYFS expertise is rarely endemic in leadership teams, there is still an over-riding tendency to view the Reception year as "preparation" for key stage 1, rather than an important part of a continuous learning journey: one year to get children "school-ready".

The Reception year can be seen as an ideological battleground. It is where policy jars, where the EYFS culminates, and where the needs of the national curriculum loom large.

In Britain, we begin formal learning much earlier than in many countries. This is often seen as a means to try and fix problems that appear in later years at an ever earlier stage, resulting in "too much, too soon". But what if that top-down pressure is causing many of the problems in primary schooling?

Ms Swailes continued: "There is a great deal of top-down pressure, particularly from subject leads and senior leads who don't always have an understanding of early years pedagogy, to provide evidence so that they can demonstrate a sequential curriculum. The perception of what Ofsted wants to see is a key driving factor in this."

Among the key findings of *Bold Beginnings*, it was noted that in schools with successful Reception years, headteachers recognised that the year was fundamental to their school's success and were clear that children's achievements up to the age of five can determine their life chances.

However, worryingly, many headteachers thought that there was no clear curriculum in Reception, believing that there was little guidance about what four and five-year-olds should be taught, beyond the content of the Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2013).

The last major revision of the EYFS landed almost four years ago (DfE, 2017). However, in October 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a public consultation seeking views on changes to the statutory framework for the EYFS.

The consultation includes proposed changes to the educational programmes, the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and the EYFS profile assessment. These will come into effect in September 2021.

The government published its consultation response in July last year (DfE, 2020a) and has now revised the framework and made its latest version available for early adopter schools (DfE, 2020b; see also the government-funded Foundation Years website (2019) for information).

There has been much controversy over the government's choice of advisors for this review process and it is not hard to see why. The early years sector, which includes PVI (private, voluntary or independent) settings, childminders and schools, was under-represented and there appeared to be a focus on primary teaching experts and commercial phonics scheme operators.

For many who deliver the EYFS it felt like the government still had not come to terms with what or who an early years expert is. More recently, there was some consternation that the panel that helped shape the Development Matters non-statutory guidance update (DfE, 2020c) featured no representatives from the PVI sector, the largest body of settings in the foundation stage. This guidance is also available on the Foundation Years website (2019).

Of course, you can imagine government ministers thinking, "this is where we need children to get to, so let's start at the top and work backwards", and academically that might hold water, but it ignores at its peril the need for all educational programmes to be underpinned by child development research.

As *Bold Beginnings* suggested, in schools where Ofsted recognises excellent Reception year practice, headteachers (including senior leadership teams) fully understand the importance of the year to a child's life chances.

But how many primary school headteachers can claim to have a deep understanding of the EYFS and the subtleties of the Development Matters document or the statutory characteristics of effective teaching and learning?

What portion of a school's precious training capacity is devoted

“Reception year can be seen as an ideological battleground. It is where policy jars, where the EYFS culminates, and where the needs of the national curriculum loom large”

to really getting that transition between key stages spot on, ensuring children are able to gain the most from their last year in the foundation stage and that it remains an important phase in its own right?

This focus on the child is vital, as Louise Broughton, an experienced head of Reception year, emphasises: "There are movements within education to regain some element of the EYFS curriculum provision – e.g. creative, problem-solving, experiential and outdoor learning elements – in both the key stage 1 applied curriculum and learning environment, but it is dependent on headteachers' (and staff's) willingness to focus on the child's needs from a pedagogical viewpoint. This is a hugely important factor in effective transition."

Ministerial madness

Headteachers face pressure coming from policies devised by the education department as well as the way these policies are then filtered into practice via training providers.

The type of teaching that characterises poor Reception year practice, with silent children sitting at desks being "taught" (hopefully an exaggeration, but you get the point), stems from poor ministerial judgement.

Many in the early years sector will remember with horror, former under-secretary of state for education, Liz Truss, proclaiming the qualities of French education, with silent, desk-bound children absorbing information: she famously stated that children in England's chaotic nurseries were running around with no purpose (Williams, 2013).

This view was and is, of course, nonsense: "I usually visit 50 to 75 schools and settings a year, and the idea that the early years is chaotic, with no adult-led learning and children doing whatever they like is not something that I've come across," Ms Swailes tells me.

"Sometimes people look at early years through the lens of school and older children. It would be amazing if every ITT route had a module on basic child development and every teacher, regardless of key stage, was expected to have at least one teaching placement in an early years setting. I really think there would be a lot more respect and understanding if this were to happen. All too often the lack of

respect is based on a series of myths about what happens rather than the reality of what actually does happen.”

Ms Truss' ignorance of the sector she was supposed to be leading caused quite a reaction, especially when it was revealed that she had visited only a very small number of nurseries during her tenure.

However, as with Michael Gove's education reforms, the after-effect of her comments has been hard to shake off and this attitude seems to have become embedded into ministerial thinking and planning.

Strong partnerships

This is why it is so important, where possible, to forge strong partnerships with your local nurseries and pre-schools. Shared knowledge can lead to shared understanding and goals; learning from each other and reflecting on the purpose of the year can only benefit the children attending your Reception class.

It might not be possible to have close relationships with all feeder early years settings, but why not try to foster a long-term, mutually beneficial engagement with a range of settings?

After all, while all early years settings work under the EYFS and its guidance documents, a child who spends time in an outdoor only setting will have a different experience than one who attended a Montessori setting, as just one example. Remember, too, that there will be children in your Reception class who attend childminder settings which can also offer the EYFS.

Sue Allingham from the Early Years Out of the Box Consultancy reminds us that some schools are doing this really well: “I've just finished a project in Leicestershire working with Reception and year 1 classes. It isn't that hard to look at the EYFS and national curriculum as a continuous curriculum, and once the teachers realise what is possible the possibilities are endless.”

A deeper understanding

For those looking to gain a deeper understanding, one of the key texts used by Reception teachers is *The Reception Year in Action* by Anna Ephgrave. First published in 2012, it has been updated to reflect changes to the foundation stage. As the title suggests, it offers a month-by-

“There are fewer senior leaders with EYFS experience. Some are very aware of this and try to skill themselves up as much as possible; others try to impose a ‘key stage 1-lite’ approach”

month insight into how a successful Reception class operates.

Ms Ephgrave offers some advice for primary school headteachers looking to improve their Reception year practice: “I would really want them to have an understanding of early brain development and how this should then have a bearing on practice.

“The prime areas and the characteristics of effective learning are the critical foundation for all learning. Top-down pressure often results in schools trying to do too much too soon and then they wonder why things go wrong. Focus on wellbeing and involvement and everything else falls into place.”

So, is it simply a case of leadership teams not having enough early years experience?

“This is an interesting one,” Ms Allingham continued. “There are some great teams in primary schools and there are some tricky ones. It should be a requirement that all senior leadership teams, key stage 1 and 2 teams, have training in the EYFS. They don't necessarily need to come from an early years background.”

Ms Swailes says that in her experience, “there are fewer senior leaders with EYFS experience than with experience of key stage 1 or 2. Some are very aware of this and try to skill themselves up as much as possible; others try to impose a ‘key stage 1-lite’ approach.

“Understanding of the importance of characteristics of effective teaching and learning and the prime areas is not always universal and there is pressure to have evidence of every area of learning for every child with next steps in many schools. Despite the

latest changes to the EYFS, many leadership teams are naturally reluctant to let these approaches go and want to see evidence and tracking of all areas.

“I run a course called, ‘I think it's good but...’ because this is what leaders often say to me about the EYFS. They admit that they don't have enough understanding of what effective EYFS pedagogy looks like and often get conflicting messages.

“This can lead to one of three things, they either stay out of early years and don't challenge or support, because they don't feel confident, or they try to turn (Reception) into something they understand better but which doesn't always meet the children's needs. The more confident leaders realise that they don't yet know enough and seek support from people who are experienced and research informed.”

What master does Reception year serve?

As with any stage of education, a careful balance needs to be struck between ensuring children are challenged and ensuring they are not subject to inappropriate teaching practices and top-down accountability and other pressures.

The ELGs that form the basis of the EYFS Profile are effectively the handover notes for key stage 1 teachers. They are used to assess pupils at the end of Reception.

The government's review of the ELGs preceded its wider EYFS review, the outcome of which was published last July as mentioned (DfE, 2020a). The ELG review reveals much about the government's own muddled thinking about the Reception year.

Rather than assess the ELGs as part of a foundation stage review, it stemmed from the Primary Assessment Consultation (PAC), which began in 2017 and published in September of that year.

The government did acknowledge that this would be contentious given the lack of early years input as part of the PAC.

You can see the thought process: the findings from the PAC would be used to alter the ELGs to better fit the primary assessment goals, which would in turn require the EYFS to be reviewed and amended to meet the requirements presented by changes to the ELGs, effectively altering the EYFS but not in any way based on the needs of children nor underpinned by child development

research, but by the outcomes of a review of primary assessment.

You can see why most child development and learning experts cried foul. Who does that process serve?

Early Education, backed by a significant number of early years organisations, conducted a research review in 2019 in response to the government's review of the ELGs. Entitled, *Getting it right in the Early Years Foundation Stage* (Pascal, Bertram & Rous, 2019), it makes this key point, which seems important: “When educational attainment through primary school and beyond are prioritised as goals for the foundation years, securing good child outcomes which are identified under characteristics of effective learning, communication and language development, personal, social and emotional development and physical development should be prioritised.

“Focusing too soon on literacy and certain mathematical outcomes ... may be detrimental to the longer term attainment of those children who are not yet secure in oral language outcomes, including an understanding of how language works in the wider social and cultural context.”

Literacy and maths

Focusing on literacy and maths might sound like the right way forward in terms of future testing, but it may not serve the children in the long run.

Ms Broughton added: “This is the year group where you set the tone for communication, interpersonal skills, aspiration and self-awareness. Their needs will vary greatly so ensure that your staff address the needs and behaviours of the unique child ... pedagogical skills are a super-strength. A child's self-esteem is everything, especially from a young age.”

Ms Broughton also suggests that a rich, diverse and creative curriculum will pay dividends in year 1 and above. Primary school leaders might consider their own thinking around the Reception year in their schools in this context.

Reception Baseline

Amid all of this tension, one piece of good news is that the introduction of the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) has been postponed for a year, although schools are free to become

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early adopters. There is no need to open that can of worms here, suffice to say that when tenders were first submitted for the assessment, schools overwhelmingly chose an observation-based assessment developed by Early Excellence as their preferred choice, against mostly screen-based, tick-box alternatives.

The government, however, had other ideas and chose to shelve the plan. When it eventually re-opened the tender process, it made clear that observation was not the way forward, it wanted screens, and eventually approved a version developed by NFER.

There has been a huge amount of controversy over the purpose of the RBA and whether it provides any meaningful data – ultimately, it is for schools to decide whether they want to be part of yet another assessment process developed not to aid child development but, as some would maintain, to produce more lines of data on a spreadsheet.

Making a positive impact in the Reception year

Leaving these real and on-going tensions aside, what about good practice in general? There are many ways to make a real and lasting

difference to provision in the Reception year, none of which involve drastic action to be taken. Let's take a look at some key, and interlinked, areas...

Understand the EYFS

To really get the best out of the Reception year, the senior leadership team in a primary school will need an in-depth knowledge of child development.

As Ms Broughton suggests, the government's focus has been too narrow, favouring testability over pedagogy.

For example, she explained: “The revised EYFS 2021 baseline and revised curriculum was flawed pre-pandemic (originally planned for 2019) because the government was adamant about securing a uniform baseline, instead of consulting and utilising the knowledge and skills of the teaching profession, research academia and other professionals connected with the EYFS/key stage 1 stage.”

She suggests that senior leaders “refocus on the rich pedagogical foundations of the EYFS' epistemological ethos”.

So what steps can be taken? Ms Broughton added: “It depends on a willingness to engage in an enriched

curriculum; my ethos is that we Reception staff ‘set the tone’ for the child's (and their family's) engagement with the school and their educational journey.

“Our professionalism translates into a smooth transition in a year where a child makes the most rapid levels of development.

“As a Reception headteacher myself, it is ideal that a teacher has full knowledge of the pedagogical foundations which underpin excellent EYFS practice and provision.”

Ailsa Chapman, deputy head of the lower school at Cypress Primary School in south London, part of the Pegasus Academy Trust, takes up the theme of needing to understand pedagogical foundations.

She recommended: “Allow children to take risks in a safe environment; do not make the early years clinical and risk-free: the very best learning will occur when children are allowed to experiment and be slightly out of their comfort zone.” Remember Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978)? (See also Martin, 2007.)

Value the EYFS

It is vital that you view the Reception year as important in its own right,

not simply as a year of “preparation” or pushing the national curriculum down into the EYFS.

“Try not to have a ‘top-down’ approach: we are not ‘preparing’ children for key stage 1,” emphasised Ms Chapman. “Make your school ethos ‘bottom-up’ instead and make the early years magical.”

“Even the language you use around it matters,” suggests Ms Swailes. “Get it right and you set children up for a great education.”

This might sound obvious, and you might already do this, but all too often the Reception year is viewed through the lens of older children and the progress they will go on to make. While this is an important consideration and part of the on-going education journey, it is vital that this year is valued in its own right as the final year of the EYFS.

In order to do this, Ms Chapman recommends that: “Reception teachers/staff are made integral to whole school decisions and not seen as an after-thought. Have an EYFS lead on the senior leadership team to drive decision-making about Nursery and Reception, rather than key stage 1 and key stage 2 staff dictating what they think Reception should look like.”

Understand child development

As Ms Allingham states: “Everyone must understand child development and what is and isn’t appropriate. Do not get taken in by ‘fancy pants’ ideas – keep everything real and about real-life experiences.”

Ms Broughton added: “This is the year where you set the tone for communication, interpersonal skills, aspiration and self-awareness. Children’s needs will vary greatly so ensure your staff address the needs and behaviours of the unique child – again, pedagogical skills are a super-strength. A child’s self-esteem is everything, especially from a young age.”

Teachers should be rigorous about teaching the “basics”, phonics, early mathematics etc, in the Reception year, but Ms Chapman believes that you should, “advocate for a play-based approach and free-flow access to the outdoor area, as much as possible”.

Listen to staff, support them, train them

Training budgets are tight and taking staff out of class can prove difficult at the best of times, but it is vital that your Reception team feels valued and supported.

“Invest in training so that all leaders understand what good practice looks like,” Ms Swailes advised. “Understand that just because it isn’t the same as key stage 1 it doesn’t mean that it isn’t as intellectually challenging. Spend time there and talk to practitioners

about why they do things the way they do, so that you understand.”

She also suggests that you ask the team in Reception what you can do to support them: “There is a great deal of change in the early years at the moment and teachers are working really hard to make it work, so a quick chat every now and again about what needs to be done, and what is desirable, but not totally necessary, can make all the difference.”

Leadership priorities

As Ms Swailes says, there is a great deal of change and uncertainty in the early years at the moment and your staff will have much to digest.

Think about your school: How much training are you devoting to the forthcoming changes to the ELGs, for example? How familiar are you and other senior leaders with the proposed changes to the EYFS and Development Matters? How are you critiquing the changes, is it through an early years prism, or a national curriculum lens? What discussions have you held with your Reception staff and have you reached out to experienced early years trainers? If not, then you may need to, because you need to ensure that your staff are working in the best interests of your children and within the EYFS.

It would be invaluable if all Initial Teacher Training (ITT) routes contained a module on basic child development and ideal if all teachers, regardless of key stage could spend at least one teaching placement in an outstanding early

years setting. Respect and understanding would increase, as would knowledge of a child’s learning journey.

Training budgets are precious, but it would be money well spent if you could increase your team’s knowledge of early childhood development. Reading *The Reception Year in Action* (Ephgrave, 2012) would be a great place to start.

Ms Broughton added: “Invest in the Reception year in terms of provision and staff professional development (as you will for every other year) and it will pay dividends for the child and your school. Bring literature and critical thinking skills alive for the children and teach them varied skills that may become hobbies as they grow.”

Listen to the children

Children are agents in their own learning, a fact that is ingrained in early years teaching but may get lost to the demands of the curriculum in later key stages, as Ms Allingham reminds us: “The children may be young, but they all have ideas and thinking of their own to offer that we can use to inform our teaching and build on.”

Children also learn best when engaged. “Advocate a workshop approach where children can develop vital skills while following their own interests,” suggests Ms Chapman. “For example, a playdough station, loose parts, a woodwork station, etc.”

If you allow “top-down” pressures to influence your Reception Year you

risk alienating children from their own learning and the ways in which they engage with the EYFS.

Reflect on the ‘why’ of what you do

Reflection is such an important part of both teaching and learning. Ms Swailes suggests: “Ask yourself why you want certain things to happen and what the impact will be on children and learning.”

This goes back to talking regularly with your Reception staff and understanding what is happening in child development research and interrogating changes to the foundation stage.

What works and why? What changes could be made to the learning environment? What impact will the latest government policy have on your staff and the children? Can you see signs of the national curriculum impinging on the EYFS, and if so, do you know what benefit you think it will bring, do you understand the consequences?

Be a Reception year champion

It is clear that teaching staff need to be shown more respect in terms of their subject knowledge, but also regarding the pedagogical strength of the foundation stage.

Headteachers need to show they value their Reception year staff and the importance of the EYFS, even more so than the rest of their staff because the loudest detractors of what goes on in the Reception year are often those with little or no knowledge of working with young

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children or child development.

Too often, newspaper headlines, or online forums deride the work that happens in the foundation stage. Most of those commenting will not realise that the EYFS, including the Reception year, is its own key stage, with its own research-base and pedagogical underpinning.

Headteachers and senior leadership teams need to counteract this misinformation, among parents and in the local and national press, whenever possible.

This will offer much needed support to Reception staff. So, whenever you see the early years belittled, point out that your staff hold qualified teacher status, and that many working in the early years have post-graduate qualifications.

Do not stand by as social media warriors talk down this most important year. It may seem trivial, but many staff working in the foundation stage will have spent many years battling against these negative attitudes and headteachers play a crucial role in heading perceptions and status.

A bottom-up approach?

There is an argument, of course, for bringing elements of the EYFS into key stage 1 teaching, as Ms Chapman has suggested, by using a bottom-up approach, one that mirrors many other countries.

Would this be possible in your school, while still delivering the national curriculum? It would take courage and a deep understanding among staff and governors of the benefits of the pedagogical underpinning of the foundation stage. Ask this question, are you and your senior leadership team confident in your knowledge of the benefits of using a bottom-up approach, and the consequences of a top-down approach to the Reception year? Ms Broughton, thinks this is possible: “I think that there are movements within

“ Viewing the purpose of the Reception year as preparing children for the school years ahead hinders provision from the outset ”

education to regain some element of the EYFS curriculum provision (e.g. creative, problem-solving, experiential and outdoor learning elements) in both the key stage 1 applied curriculum and learning environment; but it is dependent on headteachers’ (and teachers’) willingness to focus on the child’s needs from a pedagogical viewpoint. This is a hugely important factor in effective transition from what I have observed and delivered.

“In my personal experience, although the EYFS curriculum clearly states an outline strategy for transition to key stage 1, only in one setting have we achieved this effectively because we were emphatically supported by the headteacher in ensuring that transition was focused on the child and not the transfer of data to year 1 teachers.

“In fairness to headteachers, I think that this is impacted by budget constraints (e.g. giving both EYFS and key stage 1 staff time to meet during the school day) and by how much the EYFS curriculum is prioritised by the leadership team and the wider teaching staff.”

Conclusion

The *Getting it Right* review (Pascal, Bertram & Rous, 2019) made a very crucial point when it comes to understanding how we can improve the Reception year: “There

is little rigorous qualitative or quantitative research focused on the curriculum and pedagogic transitions from the EYFS to key stage 1 and how this affects children’s learning progression and outcomes.”

The ELGs, the EYFS and the PAC reviews all help with context, but when it comes to really understanding the Reception year, Ofsted’s *Bold Beginnings*, despite its flaws, may be the best “policy” guidance we have.

Viewing the purpose of the Reception year as preparing children for the school years ahead hinders provision from the outset. It implies a re-adjustment: you’ve had your fun... This undersells the excellent teaching going on in many schools around the country. A better mindset would be to understand the Reception year as a vital part of a child’s educational journey; a seamless transition, but a unique phase in its own right. More

specifically, a continuation of a child’s learning journey.

This year and next, the Reception year will become more important than ever: your staff will be facing key changes to all of the major framework and guidance documents that shape their practice, as well as the potential introduction of RBA.

At the same time, children will be joining who have had a range of different experiences with Covid and who will have spent differing amounts of time in their setting. They will not be insensitive to the many changes taking place in the wider world as a result of the pandemic, which means it is more important than ever that, as head, you work with your Reception staff and the wider school to ensure that Reception year practice is based on quality child development research and strong relationships with the foundation stage settings in your community.

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