



on the grapevine



Nursery World and NDNA join forces for a behind-the-scenes column

WRONG BASELINE Confusion has reigned after maintained nursery schools have been contacted by the DfE to trial the Reception Baseline which, as the name suggests, is aimed at Reception classes in primary schools. 'Makes me wonder if they are just asking everyone in the hope they will get enough that agree to take part,' said one commentator. The DfE has confirmed only state settings 'with a reception cohort' will take part.

IN THE MONEY According to the Government's National Careers Service, a nursery manager earns up to £45k per year, or an average of £34k, and works 35 to 40 hours per week. One nursery owner wrote online, 'Now wondering why we spent 26 years investing /building/running our nursery when [this imaginary manager] could earn more than both of us put together and improve our work/life balance.'

EPI-PENALISED Nurseries in Cheshire are lobbying the Government along with NDNA about being unable to use epipens. The Regulations say all schools and council-maintained nurseries are allowed to buy, store and administer adrenaline injectors – but PVI nurseries cannot. One nursery owner said, 'We are just as likely to care for children with severe allergies. It seems ludicrous that private nurseries weren't included in the legislation at the time.'

ROUGH TRANSITION Reports coming in from Liverpool indicate only one school is now bothering to send teachers on transition visits to nurseries, while schools want transition forms in April/May rather than June/July – despite the developmental progress children could make over these few months. One nursery manager, who is working with the schools forum to try to improve this, said: 'This is a missed opportunity as teachers would learn so much more about the children in their nursery settings where they are comfortable and confident.'

EYFS training: part 3 – Observation, assessment and planning

Good looking

How should practitioners best be observing children, assessing progress and letting this knowledge inform their planning, asks **Charlotte Goddard**



- **The EYFS calls for a progress check at age two, the EYFS Profile in Reception, and ongoing observation-led assessment to feed into planning.**
- **Over-reliance on digital systems, an inability to monitor progress, and difficulties in interpreting the data are common.**
- **Some practitioners spend too much time recording data.**
- **Training should cover both how to carry out observations and assessments, and the theory behind the process.**

As the Government presses ahead with plans to introduce a new baseline test in Reception classes, early years assessment is under the spotlight. The Early Learning Goals, which feed into the EYFS Profile, have also been revised and are currently being piloted in schools: practitioners will need to get up to speed on the new goals before they are adopted.

The progress check at age two, and the profile to be completed at the end of the EYFS, are already statutory requirements.

Practitioners must also carry out ongoing assessment to understand children's level of achievement, interests and learning styles and to then shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations.

The observation, assessment and planning cycle is crucial to children's progress in the EYFS, but some practitioners are confused about what is required. Some are spending too much time on paperwork, whether because of the systems they are using or pressure from above to deliver data. This is despite the fact the EYFS framework states, 'Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork.'

'There is still a misunderstanding about the assessment part of the everyday process of pedagogy,' says Jan Dubiel, head of national and international development at Early Excellence. 'You are responsible for assessing children's learning, not generating huge piles of documents.' Ofsted's new draft inspection framework is putting less emphasis on data, something that training now needs to highlight.

An influx of new digital systems for tracking and assessing children has led to some practitioners becoming de-skilled,



says Laura Hoyland, chief executive at Hopscotch Early Years Consultancy.

'Online learning journeys are our biggest bugbear,' she says. 'We are losing the learning around child development because we are just relying on pressing buttons, and the programme fills in the next steps. So when we question a practitioner about an individual child, they are not as knowledgeable about that child and their development as they should be. Some online learning journeys are brilliant, but some aren't as good, some staff have good knowledge and some not so good, so it depends on the combination.'

Practitioners also need to be able to use the information they collect to monitor children's progress, both individually and as a cohort. The information gained can help identify the groups a setting should be focusing on to make sure all children are making good progress, whether that is boys, girls, children on Early Years Pupil Premium or those with SEND.

The data collected can reveal information about a setting's practice, such as staff members' knowledge gaps causing their key children to lag behind, or an environment which is not supporting particular elements of practice – but practitioners need the skills to interpret the data.

Jess Bell, nursery manager at Jack and Jill's Nursery School in North Yorkshire, attended a bespoke training session on observation, assessment and planning delivered by Hopscotch. 'We had identified as a setting that this was an area we wanted to improve,' she says. 'Our system was not as robust and tight as it could have been, and staff found it confusing. We weren't monitoring gaps effectively, some children were slipping through the net in some areas of the curriculum. Staff were having to take a lot of time out of the classroom routine; we wanted them to spend less time writing things down.'

Ms Bell attended the half-day training session with three or four of her team. 'It was quite specific to our nursery,' she says. 'At first there was a formal presentation about the observation, assessment and planning cycle, then it was more like an informal surgery, looking at what we do and how can we structure it better and add the bits we were missing.' This was followed by a Quality Improvement Visit to look at the steps which had been put in place.

'We changed our planning system based on what we had learned,' says Ms Bell. 'We now start with next steps, taking into account children's interests, and parent partnerships, the things we have learned about the children at home. We have moved from a paper-based to an electronic system. Staff can spend more time with the children now so we can see the benefits straight away.'

training and guidance

Guidance

- **Free Observations Guidelines** – a guide to the 12 primary observation methods and when to use them (www.kathybrodie.com/observations-guidelines)
- **Observations, Assessment and Planning** – published by the NDNA, includes a range of assessment templates that can be downloaded to use in a setting (<https://bit.ly/2F6jZcg>)
- **Early Years Assessment Materials** – contributed by nursery schools across London to help practitioners assess children's learning and exemplify the progress they make, using the *Development Matters* guidance (www.eleysp.co.uk/celebrating-childrens-learning)

Training courses

- **ONLINE Observation, Assessment and Planning Master Course** – Kathy Brodie's course includes access to a private Facebook group for sharing experiences and ideas with other like-minded professionals

(www.earlyyearstraining.org.uk/oap)

- **Effective observation, assessment and tracking in the EYFS** – an Early Education course delivered by independent early years consultant and trainer Penny Cartwright (www.early-education.org.uk/courses/effective-observation-assessment-and-tracking-eyfs)
- **ONLINE EYFS: Let's look at EYFS Progress Checks** – this 1.5-hour NDNA course covers the requirements of the two-year-old check (<https://bit.ly/2F98HE9>)
- **ONLINE Planning for next steps** – learners will have to complete five short assessments to finish the course offered by PACEY (<https://www.pacey.org.uk/training-and-qualifications/training-from-pacey/online-training/planning-for-next-steps>)
- **In The Moment Planning – 17 May** – a one-day course facilitated by Anna Ephgrave for the Bristol Early Years Teaching School Alliance (<http://beytc.co.uk/courses/in-the-moment-planning-2>)

We are also more able to home in on a child's interests, based on our knowledge and what the parents tell us about them. We have found children's progress is now quicker than we would have seen before.'

EXPERT VIEW Kathy Brodie, early years consultant, says:

'Good training should cover both the theory behind the process and what that looks like in a quality setting. We need to understand the why as well as the how. Even if a course is just focusing on observation, the training should talk about what the observation is being used for, rather than just doing it and putting it in a folder.'

'When I started out, observations were written on Post-It notes, but now there are all kinds of packages available. Whatever system you use, training on it should be offered by the provider, as all the systems are so different. A general training course should focus more on child development than on a specific system.'

'Now we are more familiar with the EYFS I think practitioners are less anxious about ticking all the boxes when it comes to observations, making sure they have the same number of observations for Maths and Physical Development, for example. Training needs to cover the importance of personalisation, and how to make observations relate to the unique child. Don't just put down that a child knows the

colour red – why is that important for this particular child? Is it a significant thing for that child – [maybe] they have never recognised a colour before?'

'When I go into a setting I can tell immediately if training is ongoing, rather than a reaction to Ofsted coming in. Trained practitioners tend to be holding back more, observing, standing back and reflecting on their own practice. "What is it I could have done better? I'm going to change something because children are not coming to this table." When practitioners are well-trained you can see the difference in the children because they are more engaged and have a deeper level of learning.'

'There should be more training around Anna Ephgrave's concept of In the Moment Planning – practitioners need to understand what "in the moment" actually is.'

'Assessment has got a bad reputation at the moment, people associate it with testing. Current training needs to make it clear that it is different. A lot of early years services don't actually have anything to do with the EYFS Profile or baseline testing because the children they work with are too young, but it is important for practitioners to understand what children will be stepping into when they leave their setting, and why they are getting that top-down pressure from schools. That is why training on observation, assessment and planning should cover birth to six.' ■

ILLUSTRATION ROSE BARTON

