

Early Years Foundation Stage

Strategic Leadership Guidance for Headteachers (OCC)

(updated in line with EYFS 2024)



This document is accompanied by a set of tools and templates.

Purpose of this guidance:

- to help you monitor the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage in your school
- to support your understanding of the statutory requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- to support improvements in progress and outcomes for all children in the Foundation Stage through effective action planning

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Introduction

This document can be used to guide strategic, structured monitoring of the Foundation Stage by Headteachers and Early Years Governors. It is intended as an **initial guide** in those circumstances where leadership and management have yet to create a thorough, systematic structure for such monitoring.

To explore this area more deeply you can refer to 'Achieving excellence in the early years: a guide for headteachers' published by Early Education.

The Ofsted School inspection handbook – Leadership and Management section states: "The leadership and management judgement... focuses on the areas where inspection and research indicate that leaders can have the strongest effect on the quality of the education provided by the school...the extent to which leaders focus their attention on the education provided by the school. There are many demands on leaders, but a greater focus on this area is associated with better outcomes for pupils".

Thus, an intentional and structured focus on the quality of education provided in the Foundation Stage will lead to better outcomes for pupils and provide a strong basis for learning through subsequent key stages.

Factors for effective leadership to support high quality practice and provision in the early years:

- The Headteacher and EY Governor are knowledgeable and confident about Foundation Stage pedagogy and the statutory requirements of the EYFS
- The Headteacher and EY Governor work with the Early Years Foundation Stage Coordinator in shared leadership
- The Headteacher and EY Governor have appropriate and effective monitoring systems for the EYFS and work with the EYFS Coordinator to ensure high quality practice and provision
- The Headteacher and EY Governor encourage and support the ongoing professional development of the Foundation Stage staff
- School Subject Leads are knowledgeable and confident about Foundation Stage pedagogy in their area of specialism

Essential key documents:

Ensure all relevant personnel (including EY Governor) have the essential key documents.

- [Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage](#)
- [Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (non-statutory guidance 2021)
- [Ofsted School inspection handbook](#) (see Evaluating early years and Grade description for early years provision in schools)

EYFS Pedagogy and implications for monitoring teaching

The EYFS has 4 themes (see the Statutory Framework and the non-statutory guidance for more detail about the principles that inform these themes):

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development

Monitoring of quality should consider all 4 themes.

There is a distinct pedagogy in this key stage which is based on learning through play and exploration. This includes a balance of **adult-led** and **child-led learning**. This must be understood in order to observe and reflect on the teaching and learning, and to make a judgement about strengths and aspects for improvement. For more information refer to 'Achieving excellence in the early years: a guide for headteachers' and the essential key documents. You can also contact the Early Years Team for more advice and access to training including Bitesize CPD at early.years@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The following is a simplified explanation.

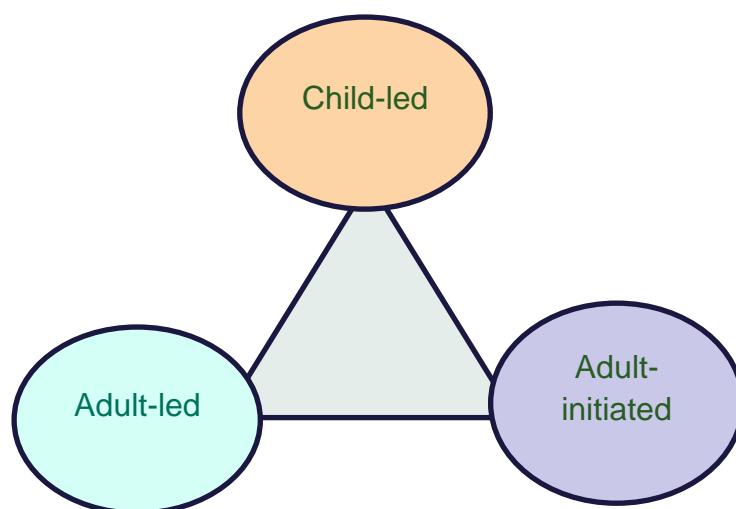
Child-led learning is as important as **adult-led** since this is where children are given the chance to have their own goals in mind, to have autonomy over where they take an activity and to develop essential skills for being a learner – creativity, problem solving, persistence etc (see The Characteristics of Effective Learning in the EYFS).

In these two types of learning the leader of the learning switches, but adult and child have a role to play in both.

In **adult-led** (or adult-focused) the practitioner has decided the activity or the session, has a learning objective in mind, leads the child (teaches) to that objective and assesses the learning outcome.

In **child-led** (or child-initiated) the child can access resources and learning spaces (continuous provision), takes the lead themselves, chooses where they take the experience and it is now the adult who is led by the child. In being led by the child, the adult may provide support in the form of new vocabulary, additional resources, ideas, explanations, skill demonstration if required, but does not steer or hijack the play with their own learning objective in mind.

In addition, **adult-initiated** learning occurs when an activity is set-up by the adult, and often modelled. This may be related to a topic, story or interest, for instance, and can help children to make links with their previous learning. Children choose whether to engage in the activity. They may work independently although specific children can be directed to the activity.



Therefore, the 'teaching' in Foundation Stage is not always apparent as traditional 'lessons'.

The 'teachers' in Foundation Stage will include all staff in the Early Years Team.

The teaching takes place both indoors and outdoors therefore the quality of teaching in both environments should be monitored.

Looking for **quality teaching** includes looking for **quality interactions** particularly in child-led and adult-initiated learning. Observations of teaching shouldn't be limited to only adult-led 'lessons' – plan times to observe teaching across all three types of teaching and learning.

Ofsted provide a definition of Early Years teaching as follows (see Ofsted School inspection handbook):

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn.

It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges.

It takes account of the equipment that adults provide, and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations.

Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

There are tools to help you capture these elements of Early Years teaching when monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in your Foundation Stage (see table of monitoring methods and tools below.)

The action planning and monitoring process

See 'Guidance and templates for developing EYFS Action Plans' which includes templates as starting points.

The flow chart on the next page supports a process of auditing and action planning for Foundation Stage to help you:

1. audit and gather information about your Foundation Stage practice and provision
2. build an EYFS Action Plan linked to your SEF and School Development Plan

Overview of steps for Foundation Stage action planning in Primary Schools

Steps

Audit - Use the **OCC EYFS audit (previously known as Musts audit)** to assess and record how you meet the statutory requirements of the EYFS in your school

Place actions created from the audit onto an **EYFS Action Plan** (or section within the whole school development plan) *(see action plan templates)*

Use the **Ofsted Inspection Framework Handbook**, especially the outcome grade descriptors for early years, to capture what is in place and what additional actions need to be added to the action plan *(see grade descriptor grid)*

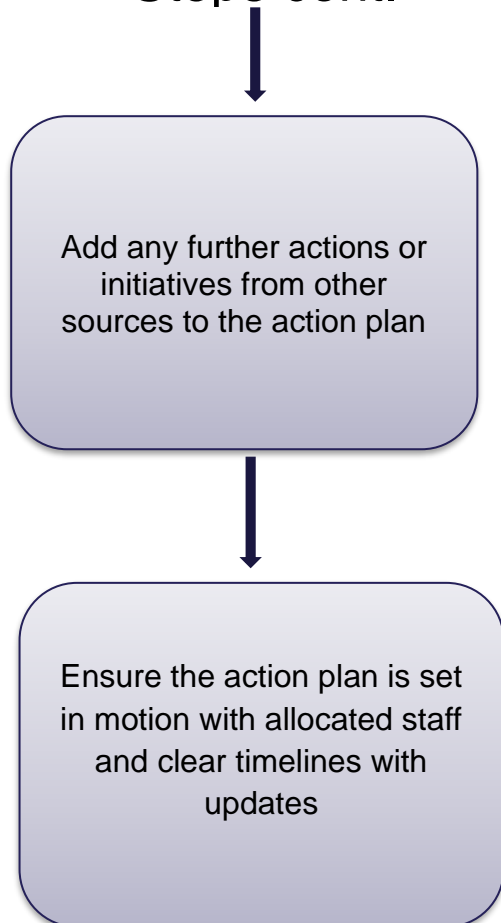
Notes

- Head Teacher should always be involved
- Depending on your context the audit may be completed by HT/ EYFSCo.
- In time, all FS staff should feed into this audit
- Repeat /review audit annually, ideally before the start of each academic year

- The EYFS is a distinct key stage with separate Statutory Requirements – therefore EYFS specific action planning supports the development and maintenance of high-quality practice and provision

- The School inspection handbook should be used, and leaders should be familiar with the early years sections

Steps cont.



Notes cont.

Additional sources of actions could be from:

- Ofsted inspection
- SEF
- Staff training
- Monitoring and moderation
- Other professionals e.g. advisors
- Curriculum Development - Intent

- Head Teacher with EYFSCo to monitor the progression of the actions and keep the plan on track
- Head Teacher and EYFSCo to check the impact of actions and set new actions if desired outcome is not met

Methods and tools for monitoring quality in Foundation Years

Area of monitoring	Method	Possible tools (located with this guidance on the EY toolkit; links)
Statutory delivery of the EYFS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYFS Audit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCC EYFS Audit ('Musts' audit)
Quality learning environment (indoors and outdoors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning walks • Audits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EY Learning Walk template • Talk Friendly Learning Environment • OCC Quality Self-Assessment for 2-year-olds • ECERS/ITERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales)

<p>Teaching and Learning</p> <p>The 7 Areas of Learning and Development (the educational programmes)</p> <p>The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations of practice / teaching (adult led, adult initiated, and child led) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult-led staff practice observation template • Child-led staff practice observation template • Quality interactions observations template • EYFS Learning Walk template • Schools Ofsted EY grade descriptor audit • Quality Self-Assessment for 2-year-olds
<p>Data</p> <p>Assessment (formative and summative)</p> <p>Tracking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis (including specific groups) • Pupil progress meetings • Year 1 Phonics screening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYFS data Analysis for HTs
<p>EY Governor knowledge and monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include in learning walks • Data analysis overview • Oversight of action planning 	<p>See above tools and templates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor monitoring of EYFS • A thumbnail guide to the revised Early Years Foundation Stage

Working with EY Governors to monitor and support Foundation Stage

In order to support the Head Teacher in the monitoring of quality in the Foundation Stage the EY Governor should:

- be knowledgeable about the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (see essential documents above)
- be aware of the quality of teaching and learning in the early years (see tools above)
- gain an overview of the EY cohort and their progress through discussions with the EYFS coordinator
- be familiar with the Early Years Action plan and key priorities
- work with the Headteacher in using the monitoring tools linked in this document

Books / websites:

- ‘Achieving excellence in the early years: a guide for Head Teachers.’ Early Education (2015)
- See Oxfordshire early years website for short [bitesize Early Years CPD](#)
- See [OCC EY free toolkit](#)
- For further support see the [Early Years Support Packages](#)
- Interacting or Interfering? Improving interactions in the Early Years by Julie Fisher (2016)

The value of this document

We would be very grateful if you could let us know which elements of this document have been useful to you and the impact of taking action based on this document. Please use the table below and send to us at early.years@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Feedback for 'OCC Early Years Foundation Stage Strategic Leadership Guidance for Head Teachers'
School: Head Teacher: Date:
Element of the document Why was it useful? What difference has it made?