

Dear colleague

As we look ahead to the return of all children into early years settings and schools in September, it is vital to plan for effective transitions necessary for children to flourish and to move ahead strongly in their learning. Covid-19 has brought unprecedented breaks in usual provision, and we must be ready to make unprecedented arrangements to meet children's needs.

A positive *transition experience* for all children and their families which guards children's well-being is always an essential part of a good education. This is even more critical now, when the Covid-19 crisis has meant the majority of children have missed out on months of education. Those who have continued to attend their school or setting will already have experienced changes to normal routines and will see further disruptions when many more children return in September. For all children, there is a big change ahead in September, unsupported by normal transition arrangements.

The best thing we can do for young children now is to help them settle in by letting them return to the people and places and they know best. There, within familiar and trusted relationships, they can be supported to build their well-being, confidence and resilience, which is the foundation of successful learning. Expecting them to 'hit the ground running' in order to catch up quickly is unrealistic and will add undue pressure. Some children will have experienced high levels of stress during lockdown and many, even if they are excited at the thought of meeting their friends again, will find the transition stressful. Stressed young children cannot learn.

We owe children a nurturing start in September that responds to their needs – socially, emotionally and educationally.

We are therefore proposing that children in preschools, nurseries, reception and Year 1 classes remain in their previous setting or class until January 2021. Teachers will then have time to assess children's progress, consolidate previous learning, and continue with the EYFS or Yr1 curriculum enabling children to be more prepared for the phase ahead. There will also be time for proper transitions, where children can meet their receiving teachers and visit their new classes, and information about children and their learning can be shared between teachers and parents building strong relationships between home and school.

We urge you to work together in partnership with preschools and nurseries, as well as within schools, to prioritise children's emotional well-being and maintain the developmental momentum of their learning and progress. Such arrangements now will stand them in good stead for their future learning. Sound foundations should not be undercut by a rush into a 'catch-up' approach that neglects the needs of the whole child.

Please see our attached **Recommendations for strong and effective transitions for the EYFS and KS1 in September 2020.**



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Recommendations for strong and effective transitions for the EYFS and KS1 in September 2020

As schools and settings look towards welcoming young children back and making a 'good start', we need to plan a positive *transition experience* for all children and their families which will build confidence, resilience and positive relationships. Only a developmentally appropriate and nurturing return to school will support the strong foundations necessary for school readiness and progress in learning. A focus on well-being and supporting children's whole development will consolidate prior learning and reignite children's interest so they will 'catch up' and move on in their learning. Our practical proposals for how to achieve this are as follows.

Autumn Term 2020

1. In September children return to the year/age groups and adults they left in March to re-settle, build on their current starting points and re-establish where they are in their learning and development as well as in their relationships and routines. This will be a time to consolidate prior learning, including the learning gained during lockdown, and to build on any positive practice developed through new ways of working with families.
2. Children who were due to start in reception classes in September remain in their nursery setting, pre-school, nursery school, or nursery class (F1). They will start their transition visits to reception classes including a settling-in period in partnership with their parents, with plenty of time to build relationships with their new teachers and develop their self-confidence.
3. Children due to start in Year 1 in September instead return to their Reception classes. With a curriculum focussed on crucial aspects of recovery, such as rebuilding relationships and reducing anxiety, and an emphasis on promoting their physical, emotional and language development, they would fulfil EYFS expectations and ultimately be ready for the Y1 curriculum. A recovery curriculum rather than a 'catch up' curriculum meets all the needs of children at their starting points through a 'process of re- engagement, which leads them back to their rightful status as fully engaged, authentic learners' (Carpenter, 2020).
4. Children due to start in Year 2 in September remain in Year 1. This will help teachers and children secure the foundations of the Y1 curriculum. Any attempt to 'catch up' what is seen as 'missing' in order to achieve end of KS1 targets would simply result in (a) leaving out chunks of the curriculum or (b) rushing children through the curriculum. Both would result in vital connections not being made between new and prior learning and, consequently, knowledge and understanding being weakened, standards falling and a pervading sense of failure impacting negatively on children's wellbeing.

Spring Term 2021

5. All children transition to their next year groups and new children start in reception. In effect this will be the start of a shortened school year.
6. During the autumn term the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, schools' nursery and reception classes and Y1 will need to keep focused on children's transitions. Supporting

children in 'catching up' and meeting their learning needs while offering a nurturing experience will call on key resources such as staffing, time and funding. We therefore counsel against early adoption of the Reception Baseline, the revised EYFS or the new Development Matters which would increase staff workload at a time when practitioners need to focus on the recovery curriculum. For at least a year, early years settings and schools will need the flexibility and funding to modify improvement plans, reshape their priorities, and put in place experiences, activities and teaching which support all children.

7. Early Years does not require short term fixes but needs immediate and long-term investment in early childhood services and infrastructure, including nursery schools and the PVI sector, to improve outcomes and reduce poverty and inequality. Covid-19 has further exacerbated the disparities between communities and the effects of huge cuts to services. This is particularly apparent with regard to early intervention and SEND support, and highlights the urgent need to look at the ways in which institutionalised racism affects outcomes for children from BAME heritage.
8. Ensuring a connected and seamless transition experience always involves partnership working across early years settings and schools. Especially at this time such partnership, collaboration and communication is crucial. The PVI sector is already exploring ways which enable younger children to remain in their nursery settings for up to another two terms, reminding parents that children's statutory school starting age is the term after their fifth birthday (www.gov.uk School Admissions). Annamarie Hassall, Director of Practice and Programmes, the National Children's Bureau, has welcomed this focus on supporting parents and children saying, 'The priority focus must be on children's emotional wellbeing as they start school' (Nursery World 23.6.20).

References:

Carpenter, B and Carpenter, M (2020), A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic, <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/#mentalhealth>

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/coronavirus-option-to-delay-school-being-explored-by-uk-s-largest-nursery-group>

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/opinion/article/actually-it-does-matter>