

Dear Parents and Carers

Over the past few months families have experienced a strange time of disruption, uncertainty and many challenges. As we look ahead to all young children returning to or starting at schools and early years settings in September, it's vital to consider how best to support children to feel confident, cared for, and ready to move full steam ahead in their learning.

A positive *transition experience* for all children and their families which guards children's well-being is an essential part of a good education. Children are all different and some will be excited about meeting their friends again while others may be more apprehensive about the changes ahead. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 crisis may have meant that your child has missed out on months of education. If your child has continued to attend their school or setting, they will already have experienced changes to normal routines and will see further disruptions when many more children return in September. So for all children, there is a big change ahead in September.

The best thing we can do for all young children now is to help them settle in by letting them return to the people and places they know best. There, within familiar and trusted relationships, they can be supported to build their confidence and well-being, which is the foundation of successful learning. Rather than trying to move children on quickly in their learning which risks missing out on important aspects of their learning, we should be offering a 'recovery curriculum' which will support them without undue pressure. Stressed young children cannot learn. This is a time to help children build firm educational foundations before progressing onto the next stage.

We are proposing that children in preschools, nurseries, reception and Year 1 classes remain in their previous setting or class until January 2021. They will then have time to firm up previous learning, and continue with their progress to be more ready for the phase ahead. There will be time for proper transitions, where children can meet their new adults and visit their new class, and the new teachers will have time to learn about the children from you and their previous teachers.

Some nurseries have started planning for children to remain with them rather than moving on to reception classes in the autumn. Schools locally could work with preschools and nurseries to arrange for the later transitions, and could make internal arrangements regarding their reception and Key Stage 1 classes. For parents with children coming up to starting in a reception class, bear in mind that children in England are not statutory school age until the term *after* they turn 5, so there is no legal requirement to be in school until January even for the oldest children in the year group.

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

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



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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>