

Press release

8th November 2013

False judgements and expectations are failing young children

Contrary to recent reports that national statistics judge nearly half of young children as 'failing' to meet standards, government expectations are failing young children, according to a leading group of early years experts who warn that starting school at two years of age will only exacerbate the problem.

Only 52% of four- and five-year-olds assessed at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) were judged to have reached a 'Good Level of Development' as defined by the government. But academics and early years experts from TACTYC, the association for the professional development of early years educators, maintain that the government expectations are inappropriate and have been moved substantially upwards from previous years.

'These new expectations set many children up to be seen as failing, but there is no evidence that the expectations are realistic or desirable for most children of this age,' said Nancy Stewart, an independent early years consultant and member of the TACTYC national executive. 'While some children will be ready and keen to achieve at this level, evidence shows that children developing their curiosity, motivation, persistence with challenge and resilience in the early years is far more supportive of their future success than learning the 3R's. These new measures demand much higher levels of performance in literacy and maths, which distorts their experiences in early years settings and school and damages their confidence to learn.'

Previously children could be judged to be at a 'good level of development' if they could read and write some words phonetically, but the measures now expect them to read and write sentences. 'In maths, children are now expected to use numbers up to 20 rather than 10, and to calculate in ways which were previously beyond the EYFS into Key Stage One,' said Dr Jane Payler, TACTYC chair.

She continued, 'Some children will still be four if their birthdate falls in the summer. These goals are not comparable to expectations for young children in other countries. Young children need an integrated approach to their care and education, which countries with the best results recognise and offer. Inappropriate goals and premature formal schooling will not foster sound foundations for long term success. Rather than ever earlier entry to school and ever higher academic expectations, very young children need individualised play-based early years experiences.'

ENDS

Contact:

Chair:

Dr Jane Payler
Faculty of Education,
Health and Social Care,
University of Winchester
West Hill Winchester
Hants SO22 4NR
Jane.payler@winchester.ac.uk

President:

Wendy Scott
Peter House
Braithwaite
Keswick
Cumbria
CA12 5SY
mwendyscott@btopenworld.com

Communications:

Nancy Stewart
Woodnote
Quarry House Lane,
Market Drayton,
Shropshire
TF9 1NF
nancystewart.stewart@gmail.com

Notes for editors:

1. **The Early Learning Goal posts have been moved**

The Early Learning Goals as statutory items are not based in professional research or validated samples of what children can do, or indeed what it is most important to their future learning for them to be able to do. Instead the ELGs have grown out of a political process, with a history of being passed down and evolving from earlier versions. This time some key ELGs have been made more stringent in terms of academic attainment. Children are now 'expected' to understand and use numbers at a level previously described as beyond the EYFS and into Key Stage One. This move was made against the counsels of early years educators and early years mathematics experts. Under the previous Reading and Writing goals children could meet the 'expected' standard without actually being able to read or write sentences, but now they are expected to perform at that higher level. Again this move was made by the DfE against the advice of those who know about literacy development.

2. **A 'good level of development' is now more difficult to attain than under the previous EYFS Profile**

The previous 'good level of development' involved a child attaining six points in key areas (this reflected a child working securely within the early learning goals, which was not the same as meeting all the related early learning goals which required eight points). With the revised EYFSP a child will be judged to have reached a good level of development only if they have met or exceeded all the Early Learning Goals in:

- the eight aspects belonging to the **prime areas**, and
- the four aspects included in **Literacy and Mathematics**.

If a child is not yet at the 'expected' level in any of these 12 ELGs in total, they will not be considered to be at a good level of development.

Since meeting the Literacy and Mathematics ELGs is far more challenging than the previous marker of attaining six points in those scales, it is obvious that fewer children would meet all 12 of the ELGs and so the GLD figures would be lower. This does not mean that children are attaining less well than previously, but just that the goal posts have been moved.

3. **Under the 2013 measures, 52% of children reached a 'good level of development', compared with 64% in 2012.**

4. **Early entry to school at age two will not ensure that young children receive integrated early years care and education that is best suited to their developmental needs.** Partnership work with families and individualised play-based approaches to support for holistic development are vital. Most school teachers and primary head teachers have neither training nor experience with children of this age, and so do not have the requisite expertise to lead and provide such approaches for such young children.