**Coalition of Early Years Sector Organisations**

**Press release: Statement on the new non-statutory guidance for the EYFS**

***7 September 2020***

The Early Years Sector Coalition of 13 organisations representing the diverse early years sector is disappointed with the new non-statutory curriculum guidance, Development Matters (DfE, 2020). We share government’s aspiration to prevent a tick-list approach which takes practitioners away from working directly with children but regret the new document will not achieve that. In our view, the new document presents a prescriptive, simplistic, limited curriculum and pedagogy, and does not reflect and respect practitioner expertise and excellent practice in the sector. It also fails to recognise all children as active and capable learners and does not provide for the breadth of challenges they will face in a complex and unknown future. As such, this document does not provide a sound foundation for providers to build a curriculum in the best interests of children.

We note that the government was not obligated to consult on the guidance because as non-statutory guidance schools and settings are not required to use it. However, a process of co-construction for the previous guidance, *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (2012)*, secured widespread ownership of the document by practitioners, and the quality of the final document was much improved as a result. A fully public and open consultation process in developing the new guidance might have resulted in richer, more forward-looking guidance which the sector could have enthusiastically embraced.

Our main concerns about the new non-statutory Curriculum Guidance are that:

1. The pedagogic approach is unclear and inconsistent and is not supported by the sector’s professional and academic knowledge base. For instance, it does not give enough emphasis to the value of play, outdoor learning and partnership with families.
2. It does not adequately address issues of diversity, inclusion, anti-racism and the decolonisation of the curriculum.
3. The guidance does not reflect the principles of the EYFS: the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development are no longer mentioned. It unnecessarily ignores much of the well-established and valued EYFS, with wholesale changes rather than evidenced improvements. The crucial observation-assessment-planning cycle has been omitted.
4. The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning have been misunderstood and therefore misinterpreted, leading to confusion for practitioners trying to understand and support children’s learning behaviours.
5. It fails to recognise children’s capacity as active learners, and thus a deficit model of children runs through the guidance.
6. It fails to support practitioners’ understanding of child development, as babies, toddlers and young children are conflated into a single “birth to three” phase. Meanwhile, separating children in nursery and reception into separate year groups fails to recognise the overlap in ages and developmental stages between children in these groups/classes.

We therefore propose to work with the sector over the next six months to develop guidance **for the sector, by the sector: Birth to Five Matters**. This is an opportunity to revise existing guidance to develop an evidence-informed document for our times that addresses practitioners’ needs and concerns about doing what is best for children. Priorities are likely to include children’s wellbeing and key skills and knowledge for every child growing up in the 21st century such as digital literacy, sustainability and citizenship. The process of developing the guidance will give practitioners opportunities for active involvement in producing guidance and resources that support practice, that reflect their pedagogic principles and that bring together research and practice knowledge.

In this context, we **invite all stakeholders (practitioners, parents, the public, policy makers and others) to engage with us in producing guidance for the sector, by the sector**, through a public process of consultation over the coming months. More details about the consultation will be made available via the members of the coalition, or sign up for further details at [www.early-education.org.uk/birth-to-five-matters](http://www.early-education.org.uk/birth-to-five-matters)

**Notes to editors**

**1. About the Early Years Sector Coalition**

In 2018, the government announced its intention to review the Early Learning Goals, and it became clear that a reform of the EYFS Statutory Framework and non-statutory guidance was also intended. Concerns about the process and objectives led all the main bodies representing the early years sector to come together to express their concerns, provide constructive support and advice to ministers and officials, and act as a voice for the sector. Those bodies, collectively representing tens of thousands of practitioners and providers, are:

* **Early Education** has 900 individual members and 400 organisational members with multiple practitioner contacts
* **The Early Years Alliance** has 14,000 members
* **The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)** represents 60,000 practitioners
* **Keeping Early Years Unique (KEYU)** represents 47,000 practitioners, leaders, parents/carers, lecturers, advisors, consultants.
* **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN)** represents HE institutions which deliver Early Childhood Studies degrees and their equivalent to 20,000 students
* **TACTYC: The Association for Professional Development in Early Years** has over 160 individual members and a reach of 21,000+ website national and international visitors.
* **Sector Endorsed Foundation Degrees in Early Years Professional Association (SEFDEY)** represents c.1000 staff and students across 70 institutions
* **The Froebel Trust** has over 1,000 associates
* **Montessori St Nicholas** represents 4,700 Montessori teachers
* **Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship** represents 500 Early Childhood practitioners
* **British Early Childhood Education Research Association (BECERA)** reaches several hundred early years researchers and practitioners
* **The Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)** reaches several thousand early years researchers and practitioners
* **The Early Childhood Forum (ECF)** has 21 member organisations each of which has hundreds, some thousands of members (some of which are also members of the Coalition).

The coalition:

* produced a review of the research literature from the last ten years to identify evidence which should be informing the changes. This was publicly launched and published and offered to government to inform its thinking.
* carried out a survey of 3000 practitioners’ views on what aspects of the EYFS should be changed to support ministers’ stated objectives. This was also published and shared with government.

The clear view among practitioners and the evidence from the research was that the EYFS Statutory Framework and non-statutory guidance did not need substantial reform. Despite this, the entire text of the educational programmes and early learning goals in the Statutory Framework were re-written. Most of the change was unnecessary and did not improve the framework in terms of clarity, practicality or correspondence with child development. Similarly, the text of the non-statutory guidance has been entirely re-written. Only 2800 schools have decided to become early adopters, meaning that over 80% of schools have opted not to introduce the new framework this year.

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