This article focuses on the teaching and learning of children aged 3 and 4 in publicly funded, non-compulsory pre-school provision. It also covers publicly funded provision for disadvantaged 2-year-olds. Provision is available below the age at which it is publicly funded; parents pay for this themselves. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework is the framework for provision for 0 to 5-year-olds.

Steering documents and types of activities

The statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, developed by the Department for Education (DfE), sets standards for the learning, development and care of children during the EYFS (from birth to age five). It is given legal force by regulations made under the Childcare Act 2006.

The EYFS framework is based on four overarching principles which guide early years provision.

1. ‘Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
2. Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
3. Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs, and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and / or carers.
4. Children develop and learn in different ways [...] and at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities’ (p.6).

It sets out learning and development requirements in terms of:

- the areas of learning and development which shape educational programmes (activities and experiences) for children in all early years settings;
- the early learning goals that providers must help children work towards - the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the EYFS;
- the assessment arrangements for measuring progress (and requirements for reporting to parents and / or carers); see the article on ‘Assessment in Programmes for Children over 2-3 years’ for further information.

The framework also specifies the safeguarding and welfare requirements that providers must meet to keep children safe and promote their welfare. See pages 16 to 35 of the EYFS framework for further information.

The EYFS framework was introduced in September 2008. It was revised in 2012 and 2014, and the current framework came into effect in April 2017. The Foundation Years website, which is funded by the DfE, contains the current and previous EYFS frameworks and summarises the changes.
introduced by each update.

**Areas of learning and early learning goals**

The EYFS framework includes 17 early learning goals, grouped into 7 areas of learning and development: 3 ‘prime areas’ and 4 ‘specific areas’.

The prime areas and associated early learning goals are:

- communication and language - listening and attention, understanding, speaking
- physical development - moving and handling, health and self-care
- personal, social and emotional development - self-confidence and self-awareness, managing feelings and behaviour, making relationships.

The four specific areas and associated early learning goals are:

- literacy - reading, writing
- maths - numbers, shape, space and measures
- understanding the world - people and communities, the world, technology
- expressive arts and design - exploring and using media and materials, being imaginative.

Educational programmes must be developed by providers so that they involve activities and experiences which belong to the 7 areas of learning and development.

Practitioners must also consider the individual needs, interests and stages of development of each child when planning challenging and enjoyable activities and experiences for them.

Further information is available on pages 7 to 12 of the [EYFS framework](#).

**Note:** Since September 2018, 25 schools across England have been trialing a set of revised early learning goals, aimed at supporting children's early development in language and vocabulary in **reception class** [7]. The revised goals form part of a wider package of reform, alongside the introduction of a reception baseline assessment (see the article on ‘Assessment’ [5] for further information). The revised goals are available on the Foundation Years [website](#).

**Time allocation**

The EYFS framework does not specify the amount of time to be spent on each area of learning and development. Early years practitioners, headteachers and staff decide on the timetable (and on the organisation of teaching groups / classes and classrooms).

**Teaching methods and materials**

The [EYFS framework](#) states that each area of learning and development ‘must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity’ (p.9). It is, however, a matter of professional judgement as to the balance to maintain between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults. That said:

‘As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning’ (p.9).
The framework also identifies three characteristics of effective teaching and learning which must be reflected in practice:

- ‘playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go';
- active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements;
- creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things’ (p.10).

There is no system of approval of teaching methods and materials; early years providers make decisions about these in the context of the EYFS framework. A wide range of materials is usually provided to facilitate children’s play and learning, e.g. toys, books, ICT equipment, art and craft materials, and musical instruments, and there is normally no charge for these.

Page 30 of the EYFS framework states that providers must offer access to an outdoor play area or, if this is not possible, ensure children take part in outdoor activities daily.

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