



Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) Reforms

Pilot Report

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About the evaluator

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Executive summary

The project

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework sets the statutory standards for the learning, development, and care of children from birth to five years old. It includes a set of Early Learning Goals (ELGs) against which children are assessed based on classroom observations. Early years practitioners and teachers complete a child's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) at the end of reception year when a child is aged four to five. Each child's development is noted as 'emerging', 'expected', or 'exceeding' against each Early Learning Goal.

Following the primary assessment consultation in early 2017,¹ the Department for Education (DfE) proposed reforms to the Early Learning Goals and EYFSP assessment process with the core aims of reducing the workload and time burden for early years staff and improving outcomes, particularly in language, literacy, and maths. In June 2018, the DfE published a draft revised set of ELGs along with a draft revised handbook, which were to be piloted in 24 schools in academic year 2018/2019. The DfE announced² that the Education Endowment Foundation, working with NatCen Social Research and Action for Children, would commission an independent pilot evaluation. The objective of this evaluation was to assess the implementation of these proposed reforms in the 24 pilot schools in order to provide evidence and insights prior to national roll-out.

How was the pilot conducted?

The evaluation ran from summer 2018 to autumn 2019 and included an online survey, qualitative interviews, and a sub-study using cognitive interviews. This mixed methods approach was used to gain a comprehensive picture of the pilot of the revised ELGs. The findings in this study are based on a small group of schools purposively selected from a randomly generated sample with a mix of school sizes, geographies, and demographics.

Key conclusions

1. Participants viewed the revised ELGs positively overall, describing them as clearer than previous ELGs. They also made practical suggestions about improving the revised ELGs.
2. Schools reported that their workload had reduced due to the reduced expectations for assessment and evidence-gathering (or would do once the changes were embedded). Staff reported using this extra time to spend with children.
3. The revised ELGs by themselves were not felt to be sufficient: teachers wanted supporting materials, such as exemplification and curriculum guidance. (The intention is that these will be provided when the ELGs are rolled out nationally.)
4. There were mixed views about whether children would be better prepared for Key Stage 1 as a result of the changes, and about whether the new ELGs were more or less challenging than before. Follow-up research would be required to investigate this further.
5. Teachers welcomed using their own judgement and felt empowered to do so. However, some felt that external moderation would still be important for ensuring consistency between schools, and for gaining alternative perspectives.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/primary-assessment-in-england>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pilot-launched-to-boost-early-language-skills-and-cut-teacher-workload>

What are the findings?

How did schools understand and interpret the new materials?

Overall, teachers viewed the revised ELGs positively. Participants made practical suggestions about improving the revised ELGs for delivery in three broad categories:

- Clarity of the descriptors—teachers described instances where they did not fully understand the revised ELG descriptors and would like further clarification.
- Content of the descriptors—there were instances where teachers disagreed with the substantive content of the revised ELG. For example, the inclusion of ‘automatically recall’ in the number and numerical patterns ELG, and the use of ‘the tripod grip’ in the fine motor skills ELG.
- Supporting materials—teachers wanted supporting materials to assist them in interpreting and using the new ELGs. These included exemplification materials, further information regarding the ‘exceeding’ criterion, topic suggestions, and an updated version of the early learning guide, *Development Matters*.

The removal of the ELG for technology was broadly accepted by teachers. There were some concerns about the removal of the ELG for shapes, space and measures. Teachers had hypothetical concerns that topics previously covered in the ELG would not be taught. Teachers felt children would be less ready for Key Stage 1 if this were the case. However, while none of the pilot schools reported not covering these areas, one reported approach was to cover these areas in less depth.

There was some confusion about whether or not the ELGs constitute ‘the curriculum’. Given this confusion, further guidance about the nature of the ELGs as an assessment tool rather than defining the early years curriculum may be necessary when the revised ELGs are rolled out.

Did the changes lead to reduced staff workload?

The reduction in the burden of recording observations combined with the understanding that schools could use their own judgements meant that in general schools reported that their workload in relation to the EYFS Profile had been reduced. Some schools reported additional work associated with introducing the changes, but that this would be expected to reduce over time; others reported increased workload associated with ongoing use of learning journals. Overall, schools reported being less fixated on evidence-gathering and being more selective over what they recorded.

Teachers reported that they were spending more time with children (as a result of the reduced administrative burden) which they felt improved the quality and accuracy of their observations. Teachers welcomed using their own judgement and felt empowered to do so. Although the reduction in evidence-gathering was welcomed, some schools did request additional guidance on what constituted necessary evidence to collect.

How clear and precise were the new ELGs? Did they support assessment and moderation?

The revised ELGs were viewed as clearer than the previous ELGs and described as specific and precise, although there were some areas where teachers wanted further clarification of the phrasing or meaning of the ELGs. Mathematics and ‘understanding the world’ were two areas of learning where greater clarity or further guidance would be particularly helpful for teachers.

Schools did adapt their moderation practices and views on the removal of statutory moderation were mixed. Some felt external moderation was valuable for ensuring consistency between schools and for gaining alternative perspectives. Teachers expressed concerns about the risk of variation in assessments between schools as the revised ELGs were felt to leave too much room for interpretation.

What were views on whether children would be better supported for Key Stage 1?

Before the start of the pilot, the overwhelming view of teachers in pilot schools was that the current EYFS profile inaccurately reports on the readiness of pupils for Key Stage 1. There were mixed views on whether the changes would mean children were more ready for KS1. One view was that in some instances—for example, due to the changes in the mathematics ELGs—children would have a more solid foundation when starting KS1. In contrast, another view was that due to some of the changes, there may be children who reach the ‘expected’ level of development but are not fully prepared for KS1. Similarly, some felt that the changes could lead to more formal classroom learning, whilst others felt the revised ELGs supported more child-led activity and a focus on stories, group work, and discussion.

Introduction

Intervention

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework sets the statutory standards for the learning, development, and care of children from birth to five years old. The framework is a core document used in all schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers in England. The EYFS framework covers seven areas of learning:

- communication and language;
- physical development;
- personal, social and emotional development;
- literacy;
- mathematics;
- understanding the world; and
- expressive arts and design.

Each area of learning comprises an educational programme and a set of Early Learning Goals (ELGs) against which children are assessed based on classroom observations. Each ELG contains a description of the level of development a child is expected to demonstrate by the time they finish the reception year (the end of the early years foundation stage) and progress to Year 1. Teachers complete a child’s Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) at the end of reception year when a child is aged four to five. Each child’s development is noted as ‘emerging’, ‘expected’, or ‘exceeding’ against each Early Learning Goal.

The *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook* contains the ELG descriptors and includes information about how and why EYFS assessments should be carried out and guidance on how to:

- complete an EYFS profile;
- record children’s attainment; and
- make accurate and reliable judgements about EYFS attainment.

Children’s EYFSP data is used by schools to understand the educational and developmental needs of each individual child and to support their transition to Year 1. Local authorities have a statutory duty to moderate EYFSP judgments in 25% of local schools each year. The data is also submitted to the school’s relevant local authority at the end of the year and ultimately forms part of the national EYFSP dataset published in the autumn each year.³

³ In the current English education system, the Early Years Foundation Stage includes nursery and reception year, covering ages three to five. Six years of schooling are covered in primary schools: Key Stage 1 comprises Years 1 and 2 (children are aged 5–7) and Key Stage 2 covers Years 3–6 (ages 7–11). After completing Year 6, children attend secondary school.

In 2017, the government gave a commitment to maintaining the EYFSP and launched a consultation to better understand how it could be improved. Four questions on the EYFSP were included in the Primary Assessment Consultation (PAC), carried out in March 2017 with a clear statement of purpose: *'We want to ensure that assessment in reception is reliable and trusted, and that it both demonstrates how children have developed during their early years, and provides a measure of school readiness.'* The questions asked were:

1. The EYFSP measures a child's development against the ELGs set out in the EYFS statutory framework. Should the profile be improved to better assess a child's knowledge, skill, understanding, and level of development at the end of the early years? If so, please describe which elements could be added, removed or modified.
2. The EYFSP currently provides an assessment as to whether a child is 'emerging', 'expected', or 'exceeding' the level of development in each ELG. Is this categorisation the right approach? Is it the right approach for children with special educational needs?
3. What steps could we take to reduce the workload and time burden on those involved in administering the EYFSP?
4. How could we improve the consistency and effectiveness of the EYFSP moderation process whilst reducing burdens?

In response to the consultation, the government made draft changes to the ELGs and EYFSP requirements with the core aims of reducing the workload and time burden of developing the EYFSP and improving outcomes, particularly in language, literacy, and maths (Department for Education, 2019). The draft revised ELGs, announced in June 2018, were intended to reflect the latest evidence on child development, and the draft changes to the assessment and moderation guidance are underpinned by a wish to recognise the importance of teachers' professionalism and judgement in assessing their pupils. The revised draft ELGs and EYFSP Handbook are focused on:

- strengthening language and vocabulary to help close the 'word gap';
- strengthening literacy and numeracy outcomes;
- better preparing children for Key Stage 1;
- being clearer for teachers to interpret; and
- streamlining assessment guidance and reviewing the moderation process.

To fulfil its commitment to ensuring that the revised ELGs are 'fit for purpose', evidence from this study will inform refinement of the ELGs descriptors and approaches to developing the EYFSP. The findings will inform a full public consultation to be launched by government in autumn 2019.

Research questions

The objective of the evaluation was to assess the implementation of the revised ELGs and to provide evidence and insights into how implementation can be optimised when the reforms are rolled out nationally. A formative evaluation was designed to:

- understand how the EYFSP reforms affect staff workload, particularly in terms of trusting teachers to use their professional judgements in assessing development;
- understand the delivery (understanding and interpretation) of the new materials; these will include the EYFS statutory framework which sets out the learning, development, and assessment requirements and the EYFSP handbook which sets out assessment guidance for teachers and practitioners completing profile assessments;
- explore the perceived clarity and precision of new ELGs and their descriptors and whether these facilitate or hinder assessment and moderation; and
- gather views on whether children are better prepared for KS1.⁴

⁴ With a focus on improving outcomes at the end of Reception year.

A cognitive interview sub-study gathered in-depth data on how teachers:

- understand and interpret the reformed ELG descriptors; and
- make 'best fit judgements' when assessing children across the three profile outcomes— 'emerging', 'expected', and 'exceeding'.

The detailed set of research questions that the evaluation is designed to respond to are set out in Appendix A along with the methods and associated indicators. These correspond to each outcome in the logic model (see below). The research questions and approach to the project are also listed in the published study plan.⁵

Ethical review and GDPR

Ethical approval was sought from NatCen's Research Ethics Committee. Approval for the main evaluation was granted on 2 July 2018. Approval for the cognitive sub-study was granted on 30 November 2018.

A privacy notice was issued by the Department for Education. For the use of personal data to be lawful, the relevant condition(s) that were met is condition (e) 'public task'.

Project team

The proposed reforms to the ELGs were developed by the early years policy team at the Department for Education working alongside external early years experts.

Implementation in schools was supported by Action for Children with Claire Lishman involved in direct liaison with schools and for maintaining a log of queries submitted by schools.

The evaluation was conducted by the National Centre for Social Research:

Overall Research Lead: Dr Fatima Husain.

Study project manager: Sandy Chidley (until June 2019) and Hannah Piggott.

Researchers: Phoebe Averill and Tanya Basi.

Research Assistant: Adam Gilbert.

The cognitive interview sub-study was led by a team from NatCen's Cognitive Testing Hub: Dr Ruxandra Comanaru, Research Director, and Researchers Catherine Fenton and Emma Corteen.

⁵ The published study plan can be found here:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Pilot_study_plan__EYFSP_for_website.pdf

Methods

The evaluation ran from summer 2018 to autumn 2019 and included a survey, qualitative interviews, and a cognitive interview sub-study. This mixed methods approach was used to gain a comprehensive picture of the pilot of the revised ELGs.

The methodology used in the evaluation is set out in detail in this section covering the recruitment of schools and how data was collected, analysed, and reported. At the end of the section a timetable is provided. The table that maps research aims against the methodologies used can be found in Appendix A.

Developing the logic model

Before the start of data collection, a logic model was developed in collaboration with the DfE (which is presented in Appendix D). The concluding section reflects on the logic model and whether the stated outcomes were achieved.

Recruitment

In the 2017/2018 academic year, a random sample of 50 potential schools in England was identified by the Department for Education,⁶ and headteachers were invited to participate in the pilot. The 24 schools⁷ that agreed to take part were varied in terms of region, number of reception classes, and other characteristics including children eligible for free school meals (see Findings section for more detail). As part of the recruitment process, headteachers identified a single point of contact within the school to receive information about the evaluation from NatCen and coordinate data collection for the evaluation.

After schools were recruited, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU; see Appendix B) agreeing to pilot the revised ELGs and take part in evaluation activities was signed by the headteacher at each school. The MoU outlined the roles and responsibilities of schools, NatCen, and Action for Children—the latter supporting implementation of the pilot. Completion of the MoU confirmed the school's commitment to take part in the pilot and evaluation. All schools received a £50 book token at the end of the study.

In June 2018, the DfE and Action for Children held three events with pilot schools to discuss the revised ELGs and explain the implementation process. These comprised:

- an event for headteachers; and
- two training events for early years professionals in pilot schools.

The events covered the purpose of the pilot, the implementation requirements, and the evaluation activities that school staff would take part in. Attendees were given the opportunity to review and discuss the changes to the ELG descriptors, and the modifications in relation to the practice of evidence-gathering and moderations. To aid this process, attendees were given a change map,⁸ which compared the old and revised ELGs. Representatives from all pilot schools attended one training event.

⁶ The 50 schools that were invited to take part were randomly selected from the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) database. These 50 were invited to participate with the aim of achieving participation from 25 schools; 25 initially confirmed they would take part in the pilot, but one dropped out shortly after confirmation.

⁷ Attrition once the pilot had begun: one school opted to withdraw from the trial during Autumn term 2018, due to substantial staffing changes within EYFS. It agreed that its contributions so far to the evaluation could be used (it had already taken part in Autumn term interviews and the survey). From this point on, the pilot and the evaluation involved 23 schools.

⁸ The change map can be found at Appendix C.

Data collection

The evaluation was designed to explore the implementation of the revised ELGs, gathering insights into how they were understood and interpreted, how they affected staff workload, and their perceived clarity and precision.

The evaluation took an iterative approach to evaluating the revised ELGs, ensuring that information was gathered throughout the academic year. This allowed for discussion to take place at these critical points in time:

- before the revised ELGs were implemented, in the summer term of 2018;
- in the autumn term, when staff had started to implement the revised ELGs;
- during the spring term, when the reception year teachers had got to know pupils and had started using the ELGs for assessment, and
- at the end of the summer term, to discuss the ease and challenges of using the revised ELGs for assessment and setting out the EYFSP.

The number of research encounters (interviews and survey responses) in each of the evaluation stages is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Research encounters by research method

Autumn		Spring	Early summer	Late summer	
Survey: 24 schools, 52 responses	Telephone interviews: 24 schools	Cognitive interviews: 15 schools	-	Cognitive interviews: 8 schools	Telephone interviews: 19 schools
		-	Case studies: 8 schools	-	

Key: grey is overall evaluation activities; blue is cognitive interviews, purple is case study interviews

School survey

An online survey was administered to all participating schools immediately after the headteacher briefing and teacher training events. The purpose of the survey was to capture perspectives on delivery and completion of the current EYFSP. This provided the context through which to understand the pilot of the revised ELGs. Survey questions covered four key areas of pre-pilot practice:

- time taken to conduct assessment and views on level of evidence gathered;
- types of moderation conducted and the amount of time involved for each approach;
- use of former ELGs to identify needs (including SEND); and
- perspectives on accuracy of assessments and preparedness of pupils for KS1.

At each school, the headteacher and either the EYFS lead or a reception year teacher were invited to complete the survey. Schools were informed that additional responses could be submitted, should other early years professionals at the school wish to provide their views. Accordingly, in some instances more than two staff members per school took part, leading to a total of 52 staff members completing the school survey across the 24 pilot schools.

Qualitative research

A longitudinal qualitative design was used to explore implementation of the revised ELGs at different timepoints during the 2018/2019 academic year. This included reviewing the query log managed by Action for Children, conducting telephone interviews, and conducting face-to-face interviews within

case-study schools. Topic guides were developed for each stage of data collection and used flexibly, with open and non-leading phrasing to allow for a rich and in-depth exploration of participant perspectives.

Query log

Schools had the opportunity to ask Action for Children questions about any aspect of the revised ELGs throughout the year. Queries submitted by schools were analysed by NatCen at four points in the year: early September 2018, December 2018, March 2019, and July 2019. This allowed the research team to gain insights into issues raised by schools to inform topic guide development and final analysis.

Telephone interviews with EYFS leads (autumn interviews)

In-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with the EYFS lead or lead reception teacher in each school. These interviews investigated schools' early understanding of the revisions, approach to planning, and use of the revised ELGs. Interviews lasted up to 50 minutes and were conducted via telephone with 24 respondents.

Case studies with schools

To gain deeper insights into delivery within schools, case studies comprising site visits were conducted. These were carried out in the summer term when schools were starting to plan for assessment and moderation. A purposive sub-sample of eight case-study schools was identified based upon analysis of data from autumn term interview. The key sampling criteria were school size, proportions of FSM, EAL, and SEND children, and whether schools had NQTs working with Reception year children.

Up to three interviews were conducted in each case-study school with reception year teachers, teaching assistants or NQTs, and the headteacher. In addition to using an interview topic guide, researchers used ELG descriptors to facilitate discussion. The interviews explored:

- ongoing use of the revised ELGs, including issues encountered across the year and whether these had been resolved;
- planning for the assessment and moderation of the EYFSP;
- how the revised ELGs could be refined prior to statutory roll-out; and
- views on additional documentation to support consistency and accuracy of assessments.

Follow-up telephone interviews with EYFS leads (end point interviews)

Towards the end of the summer term, follow-up interviews were conducted with the EYFS lead or lead reception teacher in each school who had participated in the autumn interviews. Nineteen interviews were conducted at this research phase.⁹ Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes and aimed to gain insights into schools' experiences of assessment and moderation, including how moderation was conducted. Finally, staff were asked to reflect on whether the revised ELGs had affected their workload.

Cognitive sub-study

Alongside the evaluation, which focused on the use of the revised ELGs, an in-depth study was conducted using cognitive interviewing approaches. This was used to capture a rich and nuanced picture of school staff's understanding and interpretation of the revised ELG descriptors.

⁹ Of the 23 schools participating in the research at this point: three were not eligible as the staff member we wished to talk to was participating in the cognitive post-assessment reflection interviews (to reduce burden on staff we did not ask a staff member to participate in two data collection encounters in the same time frame); one did not respond within three contact attempts (NatCen's standard procedure is to consider three non-responses a tacit opt-out).

About cognitive interviewing

'Cognitive interviewing' is a qualitative technique based on theories from cognitive psychology. It is used to improve survey questions and the information provided in forms, and documents by exploring whether respondents understand the information or instructions in the intended way, as well as in a consistent manner. Cognitive interviewing techniques focus on four processes: whether respondents comprehend the information provided, how they recall information necessary to assist with the task, the judgments (or shortcuts) they make as to what information to provide, and how they respond to the requests.

Spring term—cognitive testing of all seventeen ELGs

A total of 15 interviews¹⁰ were conducted in the spring term. To not overburden participants, these interviews were conducted in schools that were not selected as case studies. All participating teachers were invited to review the revised ELGs in advance of the interview. To ensure that our approach was as systematic as possible, a core set of cognitive probes were used during each interview and for the phrasing of each ELG descriptor. Teachers were interviewed in the school and all interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Summer term—post-assessment reflection on ELG descriptors

A sub-sample of eight teachers who took part in cognitive testing of the ELGs were invited to take part in a post-assessment reflection interview. These face-to-face interviews involved teachers doing a 'walk through' of two assessments (one straightforward and one more problematic) explaining how they made 'best fit' judgements¹¹ and any evidence or observations used to create each profile. Areas of confusion or difficulties in interpretation were explored using cognitive probes. Lasting between one and two hours, these interviews were conducted towards the end of the summer term (after the profiles had been completed).

Data collection

Interviews used a semi-structured topic guide which included probes to elicit participants' thinking and understanding of words and phrases in the ELG descriptors.

Cognitive 'think aloud' techniques were used. This involved prompting participants to talk through their thinking so that the nuances of their understanding and interpretation could be captured. Participants were asked to consider each ELG descriptor and use the 'think aloud' technique to talk through the wording of the revised ELGS.

Analysis

Analysis was carried out in stages. Interim analysis of each phase of the study was conducted to provide the Department with early insights on understanding and use of the ELGs. Three interim insight reports were produced.

Analysis of survey data

The survey data was analysed using SPSS.

¹⁰Fifteen interviews were conducted, rather than the 16 outlined in the study plan, due to the school that dropped out of the study in the autumn term,

¹¹'Best fit' (which was a statutory requirement before the introduction of the revised ELGs) is explained in the EYFSP Handbook in the following way: 'Practitioners should judge whether the child's learning and development is the best fit for the ELG, taking into account their relative strengths and weaknesses. 'Best fit' doesn't mean that the child has equal mastery of all aspects of the ELG. Practitioners should look at the whole of each ELG description when making this summative judgement.'

Due to the small sample size (all pilot schools), findings from the survey have been explored and reported in a descriptive manner in combination with the findings from the other methods used. In particular, percentages have not been included as these would be misleading and not representative of early years practitioners in England.

Analysis of qualitative data

All qualitative interviews (including cognitive interviews) were digitally recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription company. Transcribed data was thematically coded using Framework, a matrix-based data management approach that supports rigorous analysis by theme and case. Using a similar matrix-based approach, data was coded for each ELG. Where possible, verbatim quotes are included alongside the synthesised and coded data to illustrate key points.

All the data collected during the pilot was triangulated to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of how early years professionals in the pilot schools were understanding, interpreting, and using the revised ELGs.

Interpreting the findings

The findings in this study are based on a small group of schools, purposively selected from a randomly generated sample, and a mixed-method methodology. They provide rich and in-depth insights into the experiences of implementing the pilot and the issues encountered with comprehension and use of the ELGs for assessment. The depth and richness of understanding provided by this methodology would not have been possible with a survey alone.

Table 2: Timeline

Date	Activity
Early 2018	School recruitment
June 2018	Headteacher briefing
July 2018	Teacher training sessions
July 2018	Pre-intervention survey
Autumn term 2019	Telephone interviews with EYFS leads
February–March 2019	Cognitive interviewing (wave 1)
April–May 2019	In-depth case study research
July 2019	Cognitive interviewing (wave 2)
July 2019	Telephone interviews with EYFS leads
July–August 2019	Analysis
August 2019	Early findings presentation
October 2019	Final report

Participants

Schools were recruited to the pilot by the Department for Education. The schools that took part in the pilot were distributed evenly across the English regions.

Table 3: schools by region

Government Office region	
North East	3
North West	3
East Midlands	2
West Midlands	4
Yorkshire and Humber	3*
London	2
South East	3
South West	2
East of England	2
Total	24

The * indicates the location of the school that dropped out of the pilot

Pilot schools were also selected based on the number of reception classes and the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Table 4: Proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, by number of reception classes

School sample		FSM high (more than 20%)	FSM med (10–20%)	FSM low (less than 10%)	FSM unknown	Total
Number of reception classes	1	1	5	3*	1	10
	2	3	0	3		6
	3+	0	2	1		3
	Not stated	3	1	1		5
Total		7	8	8	1	24

The * indicates the location of the school that dropped out of the pilot

As discussed in the methods section, one school dropped out of both the pilot and evaluation part-way through the year due to staffing changes.

School staff who took part in the evaluation included headteachers, early years leads, reception year teachers, NQTs, and teaching assistants. Participants also had different amounts of experience, from those in their first year of teaching to those with a decade of experience.

Parameters and limitations of the methods

The pilot of the revised ELGs involved 24 schools: for a pilot, the school sample was sufficiently large to deploy methods for systematically gathering rich insights. The three methods used provided specific sets of insights:

1. The survey before schools started using the revised ELGS provided insights into the school context. These findings were used alongside the other data but due to the small sample size the survey data could not be used to carry out quantitative analysis. The survey was not intended to be representative of early years professionals in England.
2. The qualitative methods deployed to study how the revised ELGs were used were wholly suitable. A sample of 24 schools is more than sufficient for conducting a pilot and to apply the evidence generated to inform wider roll-out. The staged approach to exploring how schools used the revised ELGs to develop children's EYFS Profile comprised the most robust approach possible with the parameters of the pilot. It is important to note that qualitative samples are intentionally small and purposively selected so that as wide a range of views as

possible can collected. Qualitative sampling approaches are not designed to focus on the number of respondents. Therefore, qualitative data should not be quantified and quantitative approaches to assessing robustness and quality must not be used to make judgements about the robustness or quality of qualitative methods or sampling. To do so would be to misunderstand the method itself. Qualitative approaches provide rich, in-depth insights which quantitative approaches, focused on numbers, representativeness, and prevalence, cannot do.

3. The cognitive methods used are a standard approach to examining how respondents understand the meaning of words and phrases. Cognitive approaches are primarily used for developing appropriate survey questions. The use of this method in this study provided unique insights into how practitioners understood and interpreted the ELGs.

This study used the most appropriate and robust methods and analytical approaches within the parameters of a pilot and the delivery timeframe. This study provides important evidence to inform the government consultation.

Main findings

The focus of the findings is on participants' understanding of the revised ELGs and their application in everyday practice. This section brings together the analyses from qualitative interviews and the cognitive sub-study. Where possible some data from the baseline survey is included. However, due to a small number of responses we are unable to present survey findings in a quantitative way. Instead survey data is used to describe any changes in use of the ELGs.

Understanding of the revised ELGs

Reception teachers, teaching assistants, and headteachers diverged in how they understood, interpreted—and therefore applied—the revised ELGs. Early years leads indicated that inconsistencies and perceived ambiguity around certain descriptors remained a problem throughout the year. Nevertheless, there was a view among teachers that the amended wording and structure provided more clarity than the previous ELG descriptors.

Overall understanding and interpretation

Senior staff stated that the new descriptors explicitly defined the skills teachers should expect to observe. Therefore, the revised ELGs were felt to be easier to understand overall than the previous ELG descriptors. In part, they attributed the precision and clarity of the revised ELGs to the bullet-pointed format of the new descriptors.

'I thought they were slightly more explicit actually than previously which probably was helpful, ... certainly the core ones as it were ... there's quite a lot in them. Every sentence is quite defined in exactly what they're expecting that to look like' (Headteacher, School 121).

Differing opinions were expressed as to whether the ELGs were more, equally, or less challenging than the previous ELGs overall. For instance, one view was that expectations in reception year under the revised ELGs were not enough of a step up from nursery:

'Our TA was saying, "I just can't believe how easy everything is." She'd come from a nursery background ... and I think she was a bit concerned that some of this wasn't challenging enough for lots of the children' (Deputy Headteacher, School 120).

An additional view was that taking part in the pilot had changed staff's perspectives on the purpose of the ELGs themselves. This included an understanding that the revised ELGs should not be treated as an exhaustive curriculum. To ensure that children's learning throughout the year was not limited to the ELGs, teachers emphasised the importance of interpreting the new descriptors in the context of assessment criteria only:

'We haven't stuck to just the Early Learning Goals; we've really realised those are the Early Learning Goals and not the curriculum, so we have made sure that those children have got those challenges. I think initially, we weren't quite as aware at the beginning' (Deputy Headteacher, School 120).

However, this view was not consistent across schools. Teachers referred to the ELG as a 'curriculum', and one approach, due to time limitations, was to only teach the additional areas not assessed by the ELGs once the EYFS profiles had been completed:

'Looking at shapes and 2D and 3D shapes is something that I'm planning on doing towards the end of the summer term, because obviously the Early Learning Goals will be submitted, and then we can, I can get them ready for Year 1 in that respect' (Teacher, School 109).

The ELG descriptors

This section covers teachers' understanding and interpretation of specific ELG descriptors and sets out words and phrases which were perceived to be ambiguous or where teachers felt further modifications were needed. Grouped by areas of learning, the findings pertaining to each ELG are discussed.

Communication and language

Listening

Few concerns were raised about interpreting this ELG. However, in relation to children responding to the stories they had been read, there was uncertainty as to the length of the responses children must make to achieve 'expected'. This was particularly pertinent when assessing EAL children, for whom teachers were unsure whether single-word answers were sufficient, or whether more in-depth comments were needed.

One issue raised by teachers was that '*hold conversation when engaging in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers*' related more to a child's speaking skills than to their listening skills.

Speaking

Schools broadly considered the revised speaking ELG to be appropriate for children's communication development needs, as expectations were set at a suitable level for this age group. Teachers interpreted the revised descriptor to be more achievable for EAL children, due to the removal of the requirement of using past, present, and future tenses in their speech:

'Things that were in last year's, such as ... having to use tenses correctly, love that that's gone! ... No four-year-old can really say 'I put'. They always put, 'I putted' ... That's just quite tricky for children to learn ... so it seemed to be made easier for those EAL children to get that speaking [ELG], there, which is lovely for the EAL children' (Teacher, School 120).

Similarly, teachers embraced the inclusion of '*express their ideas using full sentences, with modelling and support from their teacher*'. They anticipated that more EAL children would achieve this aspect of the ELG when compared to the former ELGs. However, whilst EAL children may be more likely to achieve 'expected' under the new descriptor, staff felt this could disadvantage the child in Year 1, as it may be presumed that they need no additional support for communication, when in fact they do.

Three issues were raised about the phrasing of the descriptor. Firstly, teachers requested clarity about '*offer explanations for why things might happen*'. They indicated that guidance on how in-depth the explanations needed to be would be helpful.

Secondly, teachers queried how much new vocabulary would need to be considered to make an assessment in relation to '*making use of new vocabulary*'. Teachers also expressed concern that they would not necessarily know whether vocabulary was new to a child. Knowing how to interpret this was thought to be particularly relevant for children who read or are read to a lot at home and consequently are likely to acquire new vocabulary outside of school.

Thirdly, to interpret the phrase '*express their ideas using full sentences, with modelling and support from their teacher*' teachers required further clarity or guidance on how much modelling and support would be acceptable.

Physical development

The separation of 'gross motor skills' and 'fine motor skills' was viewed overwhelmingly positively by early years staff. These were regarded to be distinct skills; as such, the division into two ELGs made it easier for teachers to interpret and assess:

'They are distinct ... and they have their own ways of supporting that development ... I feel like some of my lessons have been more specifically fine motor, more specifically gross motor ... now it's separate, that's been clearer to teach and clearer to plan for' (Teacher, School 104).

Gross motor skills

Teachers felt they had a good understanding of this ELG. However, '*demonstrate strength, balance and coordination*' was interpreted differently by schools. One view was that strength was exhibited when a child showed confidence in the task they were approaching. Another interpretation took 'strength' more literally, seeking to observe children's physical strength in their activities and play.

The phrase '*move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing*' elicited discussion, and teachers requested clarification on the level of accuracy and co-ordination with which children would need to carry out these activities.

Fine motor skills

Staff felt that the fine motor skills ELG was open to interpretation. Specifically, there appeared to be disparities relating to application and assessment of the '*tripod grip*' requirement between schools. For example, one view was that a 'best fit' approach should be taken to assess this part of the ELG, assigning 'expected' to children who were able to use an effective writing grip. In contrast, a second interpretation of this statement was more rigid. Nevertheless, those who did not take a 'best fit' approach hoped to see the descriptor revised or caveated to include 'comfortable grip' going forward:

'That's a pretty hard grip to have, and especially if you've not fully developed the muscles in your hands. I've got some August-born children in there, who are a whole year, developmentally, behind their, the September-born, and I think it's setting them up to fail a bit' (Teacher, School 120).

This was connected to the view that forcing children to use the '*tripod grip*' was not helpful and it was suggested that '*tripod grip*' should be replaced with '*an effective, comfortable or appropriate grip*'.

Personal, social and emotional development

Self-regulation

Overall, interpretation of this ELG was similar across schools. Though 'self-regulation' was a newly introduced ELG, teachers typically felt that it was explicit, easy to understand, and aligned with their own existing practice and expectations of children. However, self-regulation was thought to be different for each child, and it was considered difficult to judge a child's '*positive sense of self*'. Teachers also felt that the length of time children should pay attention and number of instruction steps children must follow was ambiguous:

'How long should they pay attention for? Multi-step instructions could be two, or it could be five. It's all of those teacher-led interpretations that someone less experienced might struggle with what the definition of that is' (Headteacher, School 104).

Accordingly, experienced staff felt that NQTs and those with limited early years' experience may need support in understanding this ELG. However, this view was not shared by NQTs and new teachers, who did not report any difficulties in understanding the requirements of the self-regulation ELG.

There was also a view (discussed further in the EYFS Profile section) that children's ability to meet this ELG may rely on their confidence to demonstrate these skills to a teacher, rather than on whether they possessed these skills.

Managing self

The wording of this ELG was unproblematic for teachers to understand on the whole, but one view was that it was *'like a tick list'*. An interpretation presented by senior leadership staff was that schools were expected to take increased responsibility for helping children to learn basic hygiene and self-care. This perspective stemmed from the removal of 'independence', which featured in the former descriptor:

'Things as well like managing own basic needs, including dressing and going to toilet. One word that's gone there is 'independence'. Is that therefore putting the ownership on the school to start toilet training children?' (Headteacher, School 120).

Teachers found that there was less clarity in relation to *'understand the importance of healthy food choices'*. They were unsure as to exactly how much a child ought to know about healthy food. They queried whether a child ought to know about specific food groups and/or the proportions of each food group needed for a healthy diet.

Building relationships

The descriptor for this ELG was thought to be self-explanatory and overall, teachers felt it was clear and could be applied consistently.

However, teachers felt that the expression *'positive attachments'* would benefit from further clarification. They asked:

'Is it just that a child knows other pupil's names and wants to play with them, or is it that tight-knit bond?' (Early Years Lead, School 108).

Teachers wanted to know whether 'positive attachment' should include a consideration of the age appropriateness of the attachment and whether a child was maintaining attachments as well as forming them.

Literacy

Comprehension

Overall, schools found this ELG to be clear to understand and interpret. Nonetheless, teachers discussed needing to invest more time on comprehension as a discrete learning area. Primarily, this was to ensure that they felt confident when applying the ELG to assess children's understanding and comprehension skills.

Similar to the ELG for speaking, teachers were concerned about the phrase *'new vocabulary'* and questioned how much new vocabulary would be required. Expanding on the issue, teachers requested more clarity on whether children needed to know new vocabulary *and understand it* too.

Word reading

Although staff felt this descriptor was *'so much clearer'* than the previous descriptor, they held contrasting views about this ELG and its perceived appropriateness for reception. Overall, teachers enjoyed the specificity of the number of digraphs children must be able to sound but wanted clarity about how many common exception words were needed.

Nevertheless, one view discussed was that ten digraphs were too low an expectation for this age group. Teachers related this to the phonics requirements for the start of Year 1, which were thought to be much more advanced than the revised ELG would prepare children for. As such, schools that felt ten digraphs were too few reportedly taught well in excess of the required number of digraphs.

An alternative interpretation was that the revised ELG was excessively challenging. Those that held this view noted that commonly-used reception phonics schemes expect only around six digraphs prior to Year 1. It is unclear whether this discrepancy in the number of digraphs taught led to inconsistencies in how children were assessed. For instance, whether schools that taught more than ten digraphs required children to know more than ten to be considered *'expected'*.

Further concerns surrounded the statement that reading should be *'consistent with their [the child's] phonic knowledge'*. Teachers felt unsure about whether this referred to an individual child's personal knowledge, or the ten digraphs requirement:

'Our SEN child can read simple sentences consistent with his phonic knowledge, he can read "the cat sat on the mat". ... Do we give him that Early Learning Goal because he can read aloud simple sentences that are consistent with his phonic knowledge?' (Early Years Lead, School 108).

In addition, teachers thought *'simple sentences'* and *'common exception words'* were very much open to interpretation and indicated that this was also the case with the previous descriptor. They requested further clarification and examples of what this would require in practice.

Writing

One view was that this ELG was more challenging, compared with the previous descriptor. Those who shared this view explained that it was because the revised ELG required children to complete more *'formal writing'*, similar to that expected for Year 1 children. In contrast, other teachers interpreted this ELG as overly simple due to the removal of key skills such as irregular common words:

'It doesn't say about key words, whether they need to be able to spell key words ... I would have expected the Writing one to be quite specific, the same as the Reading one has changed, but it's almost become more ambiguous. You could, if you just read that on its own, perhaps accept a lower standard of writing on the current Early Learning Goal' (Teacher, School 122).

There was a view that this ELG was more difficult to interpret without clarification or exemplification. Three specific issues were raised about the wording of the ELG:

- *'Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed'* lacked clarity especially around the meaning of *'recognisable'*. In addition, teachers felt it was unclear as to whether a child ought to be able to do this independently or by copying. Furthermore, teachers wanted to know whether a child needed to do this once or would need to remember how to do it.
- In the above, the word *'most'* was identified as being problematic and open to interpretations. Suggestions on what this meant included counting *'around 20 out of 26'*, *'21 letters'*, *'all but two letters per sentence'*, to percentages—*'60%'*, *'75–80%'*.

- *'Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others'* raised the question of what was meant by 'simple phrases and sentences' and whether these had to be phonetically plausible. Moreover, teachers wondered if a child was supposed to write these independently.

Mathematics

Shape, space and measures

There was not a consensus among pilot schools about whether topics that were not mentioned within the mathematics learning area should still be taught. For example, teachers discussed retaining 'shape, space and measures' in their teaching, despite its removal from the Early Learning Goals (see the conclusion section for further discussion of the ELGs as a goal as against a curriculum). Accordingly, for those who still taught shape, space and measures, concerns were voiced that less experienced Early Years staff would not do so:

'I think if someone was an NQT and they came in ... they wouldn't even touch space, shape and measure ... it's intrinsic in some of the things you do... but if it wasn't in the Early Learning Goals, someone that didn't have that experience of doing shape, space and measure wouldn't even think about it!' (Teacher and Teaching Assistant (paired interview), School 119).

While no school had stopped teaching this area, schools had reduced the emphasis on shape, space and measures in their teaching practice. One reason for this was because they believed that its removal from the ELGs meant that it was no longer part of the reception curriculum:

'Some people will say, "Oh, well, we'll still teach it.' And I'm like, "Well, I do. I still mention shapes, I still use the vocabulary, but it's not in my content of lessons, because it's not something that we have to teach." Some people would say, "Oh, you still need to teach shape", but our curriculum isn't telling us that we have to do that' (Teacher, School 104).

Number

Teachers liked the clarity and specificity of this ELG and felt the focus on numbers one to ten was appropriate and would help to cement children's understanding. However, when assessing ELG 'number', teachers raised concerns about what constituted 'expected'. For example, teachers were unsure whether children could use apparatus to support their recall of number bonds and corresponding partitioning facts. Similarly, staff were unsure whether a child could be regarded as able at subitising if they could only recognise quantities when displayed in dice format (displayed in the pattern they appear on a die). Finally, it was considered unclear how fast children's automatic recall should be:

'It says recall number bonds to ten, if a child's sitting for 30 seconds, one, two, three, four, five add ... That's not really recalling. If you're best-fitting that, that's, personally, I think that's too much of a best-fit. I think it's really subjective and I think each practitioner will take it differently' (Teachers [paired interview], School 102).

Teachers interpreted number bonds differently. One group interpreted it as number bonds for 0–5 (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and for the number 10, whilst the second group understood this as number bonds for numbers 0–5 and numbers 0–10, for example, including 6, 7, 8 and 9.

The term 'automatically recall' also proved somewhat problematic and teachers wondered how automatic this recall had to be and whether children ought to have an understanding of the information as well as being able to recall it.

Finally, teachers felt that the use of technical language in this descriptor might be difficult for teaching assistants or newly qualified teachers to understand.

Numerical patterns

Teachers felt that certain aspects of 'numerical patterns' were subjective and difficult to interpret, and similar to the number ELG; 'automatically recall' was queried. A key theme across pilot schools was uncertainty about the types of patterns, beyond odds and evens, which should be taught for 'explore patterns of numbers within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds':

'So number patterns, explore patterns of numbers with numbers up to ten including odds and even, we've done odds and even, we've done going up in twos, but we weren't sure what other number patterns they were expecting to see or what was suggested by that' (Early Years Lead, School 117).

Aside from this, teachers were concerned when assessing children who were able to recall double facts, but not understand or apply them in other contexts. Similarly, schools felt that implementing this ELG had reduced children's opportunities for curiosity and exploration of numbers:

'They're actually having just to know. It takes the love of it out. They're having quizzes at lunchtime and snack time, going, "What's double one? Double two? Double three?" They're not able just to play with number at the moment. We've lost that' (Teacher, School 120).

Moreover, teachers questioned whether 'compare sets of objects up to 10 in different contexts, considering size and difference' referred to the same objects of different physical sizes or different objects altogether. The phrase 'different contexts' was viewed as very open to interpretation.

Understanding the world

Past and present

This ELG was thought to be clear and prescriptive about what was required, except in relation to 'figures from the past'. Staff were uncertain in their interpretation of this element in the absence of exemplification materials. Teachers found that children often struggled to understand the history topics they had embedded into the classroom. As such, they were unsure whether they had interpreted the ELG correctly and chosen appropriate examples, or whether the topic was delivered too early in the year for younger children to access:

'We thought we'd talk about Florence Nightingale, being a significant nurse from the past ... We had all this stuff planned, it was all really exciting, but the children didn't get it, that it was from a long time ago ... I don't know whether developmentally they weren't quite ready, because we did it in the autumn term. Maybe if we did it now, they'd understand it better' (Teacher, School 122).

There was also some uncertainty surrounding the term 'past' in this ELG. There was inconsistency in how this was applied, with some interpreting 'the past' as referring to the lives of pupil's parents, others interpreting this as referring to hundreds of years ago. Teachers wanted clarification of this term, specifically around how far back in the past they should go.

People, culture and communities

This ELG was interpreted similarly across schools. However, the descriptor was considered to be too long, containing multiple different elements that required knowledge rather than skills. Furthermore, it was thought that the ELG was challenging to apply within the classroom, particularly in schools based in regions with limited cultural diversity. This is because children were exposed to fewer examples of different religious and cultural communities in their region. However, this was not a view shared across all staff in regions with limited cultural diversity. An alternative view was that this aspect of the ELG

would allow teachers to expose children to other life experiences, but a question about how many 'people, culture and communities' to cover was raised and suggestions of between two to four were given. Finally, another perception was that this ELG was inappropriate for children of this age:

'Some of them have only been alive for 60 months, and they haven't got that imagination yet to think, ah, so if I was living in Egypt, I'd be really hot and there'd be sand everywhere. They're just like, "Well, there's a pyramid. What is that?"' (Teacher, School 120).

The natural world

Staff understood this ELG consistently and enjoyed embedding it into their practice. One view was that the descriptor was suitable for early years children, lending itself to pedagogical approaches which were aligned well with early years teaching:

'I really like "the natural world" because I used to find the old one so wish-washy ... I like the fact that there's more detail about what they want us to do with them' (Early Years Lead, School 118).

'Absolutely loved teaching "the natural world". That is in line with so many of the policies and the ethos of early years of exploring, using your sense, going to see the seasons and all of that natural exploration. I know teachers in early years units might have been doing that already, but at least it's on paper that that is our curriculum and that is what early years is all about' (Early Years Lead, School 104).

Expressive arts and design

Creating with materials

Early years staff reported no issues with understanding this ELG. One suggestion was that the descriptor could have been made more explicit by specifying the kind of tools that children should be using.

Performing

In general, teachers felt comfortable in their understanding and interpretation of the 'performing' ELG. An area which staff thought needed further clarification however, was the context within which children should perform songs. When assessing children who were viewed as shy or introverted, teachers were uncertain about whether 'expected' could be given if these children were only able to perform on their own in front of a teacher (see EYFS Profile section for more detail).

Using the ELGs in everyday practice

Implementation of the revised ELGs

This section considers the implementation of the revised ELGs in relation to lesson planning, content, classroom practice, and identifying children with additional needs.

Planning

The approach teachers took to planning lessons and the school year had not changed due to the introduction of the revised ELGs. This was particularly the case for schools that described using a child led approach to planning the year.

'We're very cohort responsive. So when our children come in we tend not to have any planning in place; we really go with their interest' (Early Years Lead, School 124).

While the approach to planning had not altered, teachers took account of the revised ELGs in their plans. Teachers reported using the revised ELGs to build a long term plan to try to ensure that children could reach 'expected' by the end of the year and changed their lesson plans to ensure that areas introduced in the revised ELGs were properly covered. Additionally, in schools that previously used external resources,¹² teachers described having to create new plans. This was because these external resources did not align with the revised ELGs.

Two challenges in planning under the revised ELGs were raised. The first challenge was to create goals that moved children towards achieving 'expected' in the ELGs when children were so far away from this point at the beginning of the year. This appears to be linked to teachers not being able to rely on *Development Matters*¹³ to provide stages of development that would have led up to the ELGs. Teachers also felt it was a challenge to plan how to incorporate new topics without examples of the type of content that was appropriate for this age group.

Content

In response to the revised ELGs, schools took a number of different approaches to the content they taught. These included:

- updating all their content;
- making changes to some topic areas;
- shifting the focus of their teaching;
- altering the techniques or schemes used to teach content; or
- not making any changes.

Schools that changed all of their content described using the introduction of the revised ELGs as an opportunity to start afresh and consider with fresh eyes. This was partly so that the changes necessitated by the revised ELGs would fit well with their teaching plan. However, it was also seen as a positive opportunity to review what they were teaching.

'We felt it would be easier to completely start afresh, and it actually invigorated us, I think, as teachers. Doing the same things again and again is obviously boring' (Early Years Lead and Assistant Head, paired interview, School 122).

¹² External resources here include the use of teaching resources and curriculum providers such as White Rose, Cornerstone, and Abacus.

¹³ *Development Matters* is a document that can help early years practitioners to support children's learning and development through planning, observation, and assessment.

Schools particularly discussed changes relating to the mathematics and 'understanding the world' ELGs—specifically word reading and fine motor skills.

For the mathematics ELGs, staff described embedding many changes into the classroom in order to fulfil the teaching requirements of number and numerical patterns. They had more time to teach the basics and consolidate numbers to ten. They also altered the content to bring in more advanced areas—such as number bonds—earlier. Indeed, one approach was to modify their planning for this learning area entirely, to incorporate new areas such as reasoning skills, depth of understanding about number, and problem-solving. Furthermore, senior leadership staff emphasised a need to invest additional school funding into early years maths to support delivery of the revised ELGs, based on EYFS teachers' review of mathematics provision:

'They've [EYFS practitioners] looked at what the new changes need to be and they've pulled it into what they've been doing, and then building on that to make sure it works ... that's what we've invested more of our budget into in terms of buying resources to support that side of maths and the real understanding of number and problem-solving and the equipment that we use' (Headteacher, School 102).

Similarly, changes were made to classroom practice in order to embed the revised word reading ELG. Interviewees discussed needing to incorporate additional teaching to ensure that children met the target of ten digraphs and other elements of the descriptor. In turn, the requirement of ten digraphs in the descriptor was felt to have consequences for what was expected from children in other aspects of the ELG. For example, early years staff felt that this increased the complexity of the simple sentences children were expected to read aloud, as these were required to be 'consistent with their phonic knowledge':

'Whereas the early learning goals last year were "able to read a simple sentence", so a lot fit in really well with that, a lot could do that, whereas if, this year, they kind of have to do that but also know ten digraphs, they've got to know a bit extra, which is harder for the ones that aren't up at the right stage of the Read Write Inc. programme' (Teaching Assistant, School 104).

However, these changes were not common across all participating schools. An alternative opinion was that the revised word reading ELG was no more challenging than the previous ELG. Those who held this view were accustomed to teaching children ten or more digraphs already, meaning that they did not need to review their planning or delivery of phonics.

The introduction of ELG fine motor skills saw teachers make several amendments to their classroom provision. Teachers introduced new techniques into the classroom targeted at specific components of the descriptor. For example, activities designed to promote dexterity and muscle development in children's hands were aimed at improving children's pencil grip. Likewise, new lessons focused on the use of knives and forks in play to help children to manoeuvre cutlery effectively in dining contexts:

'You always hope or assume that they would come to school being able to use a knife and fork, but actually they can't, we do know that. ... We've bought plastic knives and forks, so we've been doing lots of Play-Doh stab and cut' (Teacher, School 121).

The revised ELGs in understanding the world were felt to encompass significantly more, particularly in the past and present ELG. In response to this, teachers described adding new topics and creating additional opportunities for children to engage with this ELG through continuous provision and cross circular activities.

Another approach was a shift in the focus of the content being taught in reception. In particular, teachers remarked that the revised ELGs required an increased focus on literacy, comprehension, and the use of books.

'I felt like there was a greater lean towards text, which is brilliant and as it should be because I think a lot of children are coming into school that haven't experienced books. So I was really pleased with those changes' (Headteacher & Early Years Lead. School 103).

This increased focus on books and literacy also led to teachers making changes to the learning environment, for instance setting up a new reading area.

Schools also altered the schemes or techniques they used to teach content. As mentioned above, a number of external teaching schemes that schools had previously used in reception do not line up with the revised ELGs. Where schools had been using these schemes, they described either altering aspects of the scheme to work with the revised ELGs or dropping the scheme entirely. Schools also noted that the recommendation that 'teachers should not be collecting unnecessary evidence' (see Evidence-Gathering and Workload section for more detail) had altered the content they taught in classrooms. This was because collecting less evidence allowed teachers to have more interaction with children and allowed children to engage more with activities in the classroom.

Where schools had not changed the content of their teaching in response to the ELGs they gave four key reasons for this: (1) the revised ELGs have not changed enough to necessitate it, (2) the revised ELGs speak to the principles and ideas they teach anyway, (3) how they teach is child-led so they don't have set content, and (4) they were still working on introductory skills which are not directly connected with the ELGs at the time of interview, so the ELGs had not impacted their teaching style yet.

Classroom practice

One reported change caused by the revised ELGs was to classroom practice. Teachers described differences in the organisation and set-up of the day throughout the pilot, relative to previous years. However, another approach was not to change classroom practice as a result of taking part in the pilot.

When reflecting on changes to classroom practice, one view raised by early years staff was that the revised ELGs resulted in an increase in the amount of structured delivery time required. Teachers predominantly attributed this to a shift in the focus of two areas of learning from skills-based to knowledge-based descriptors. These were 'understanding the world' and mathematics. For example, to ensure that children had sufficient opportunities to meet the understanding the world ELGs, new discrete topics around history and geography were built in. Moreover, there was one view that the revised mathematics ELGs necessitated more formal teaching than is typically practiced in reception:

'In the number ["numerical patterns"] it says children have to explore patterns of odd and even numbers, and I know that's been something that the children don't just naturally learn ... I've had to stand at the front and I've had to actually teach that to the children, and that's not been something I've taught before in early years' (Teacher, School 104).

Amongst those who felt that these two areas of learning were increasingly knowledge-based and lend themselves to more formal teaching methods, one view expressed was that this had concerning implications for children. It was felt that children were spending more time sat down for formal learning and therefore had fewer opportunities to develop their social skills and interact with peers through play. In addition, teachers with this view reported that teachers and children alike felt fatigued from large amounts of formal learning which did not support children's communication skills:

'Now, because the Early Learning Goals are so knowledge-based ... it's less of a relaxed time, and more of a, "right, we've got to know about a lot of things". Whereas last year it was more skills-based, and we were able to have that social time and let the children be able to speak. ... It's really quite challenging and exhausting, for myself and the children ... They're not learning those social skills independently ... It's really impacted on their speech, their communication with each other, their PSED' (Teacher, School 120).

This perspective was mirrored by the views of senior staff at schools who felt that teachers were obliged to prioritise teaching children factual content, rather than focusing practice around the child.

In contrast, a second opinion was that the revised ELGs had positively impacted classroom practice, in terms of organisation and set-up of the day. Those sharing this view felt able to prioritise child-led role-play, a move away from adult-directed scenarios. This view appeared to relate to communication and language and literacy areas of learning and the natural world ELG. It was emphasised that the revised ELGs leant themselves to content focused on stories, group work, and discussion. This was viewed positively by teachers as it helped to support children's language skills and imagination whilst simultaneously reducing the amount of resources required:

'Speaking, listening, even some of the ELG comprehension come to discussion-based activities and you can use this as a whole-class activity or group activities. Things that you can do as whole class-activities means there's less workload required to build resources. I think all of that has made it quite easy to teach, basically' (Early Years Lead, School 117).

Finally, a further third account was that the revised ELGs had not altered classroom practice. Whilst teachers recognised that they might approach the delivery of certain learning areas differently, the way in which children learn and their developmental needs were felt to be unaffected by changes to the assessment framework:

'I don't see the fundamental practice has changed. What we know about the way children—or what in our setting we think about what's effective practice to help the children learn—hasn't changed' (Headteacher, School 109).

Identifying children with additional needs

Throughout the year, mixed views were expressed about the implications of the revised ELGs for accurate and timely identification of children needing additional support.

Implications for mapping children's specific difficulties

Prior to the pilot, non-statutory guidance such as *Development Matters* was used universally in participating schools to document children's progress across defined developmental stages preceding the ELGs. As such, the mismatch of the revised ELGs with the age brackets and associated developmental milestones in *Development Matters* presented a problem. Those choosing not to use the guidance during the pilot found it difficult to subdivide the 'emerging' category to indicate how far away children were from achieving the ELG. As a result, they struggled to verify precisely 'emerging' children's level of development, including the presence and severity of additional learning needs:

'As I say, it would be helpful to have how "emerging" they are, broken down ... because some of them are, could be, 22 to 36 [months], which is clearly significant special need. Whereas another child might just be that they're still in 40 to 60 [months], so with a little more intervention in Year 1 they may get there ... Just to say they're "emerging" without any other evidence is quite a big bracket you're putting them all into' (Teacher, School 122).

Regarding SEND children, difficulties in determining these children's specific learning needs also culminated in challenges with carrying out assessment using the revised ELGs. This is described in the EYFS Profile section.

Implications for identifying the learning needs of EAL children

Views were varied as to whether the pilot ELGs helped teachers to detect the specific learning needs of EAL children and implement necessary support. Senior leadership staff believed that the division of reading into comprehension and word reading in the revised ELGs disadvantaged EAL children due to

the emphasis on retelling stories and narratives. In contrast, early years staff reported that separating these two skills allowed staff to precisely identify EAL children's specific strengths and weaknesses:

'What we did like now is the fact that the reading is split into word reading and comprehension, because it shows we're strong in phonics, but due to the language, the comprehension is lower' (Early Years Lead, School 102).

Nevertheless, teachers seldom felt confident with assessing the language skills of EAL children against the ELGs. Despite children's language skills improving considerably across reception year, it was thought to be unclear exactly how much vocabulary EAL children were expected to have, though it was not clear if this was a new issue that had arisen due to the introduction of the revised ELGs. As such, one suggestion was to have a prescriptive, standalone assessment tool to support staff to assess EAL children.

No implications for identifying children's needs

Conversely, another view was that the revised ELGs made no difference to how and when children's needs were recognised. Staff emphasised that performance against ELG descriptors is not the main mechanism by which children's additional needs are identified. Instead, teachers' in-depth knowledge of each child was perceived to be fundamental to detecting individual children's support needs at an early stage:

'In my opinion I don't think that has affected our ability in identifying those children. I think whenever you do an activity, you obviously differentiate and you have expectations of the outcome of each child ... from an early point in the year those children that need extra support do show themselves' (Early Years Lead, School 109).

Teachers also described other ways in which children's needs were identified early on. These included holding regular pupil progress meetings between all early years staff to share information about children's development, as well as conducting routine in-house speech and language screening. Nursery staff and children's parents also provided feedback about children's learning needs upon entry to reception. This takes place as part of normal practice and was unaffected by the revised ELGs.

Consequences for securing learning support for SEND children

Due to the revised ELGs making it difficult to use *Development Matters* to track progress of children, problems were experienced with sharing information externally with other professionals working around a child. For example, issues were reported when referring SEND children to additional support using just the pilot ELGs to describe children's profile of needs. Indeed, referrals were often unsuccessful in the absence of *Development Matters* age-related milestones to supplement an assessment of 'emerging' on the ELGs:

'Our local authority wouldn't accept lots of the paperwork we were sending through for a child that we were applying for ECHP because they couldn't accept that we couldn't give them a month band. In the past we've said, "This child is working between 30 to 50 [months] emerging band." We couldn't have that, and our local authority just didn't accept any paperwork and applications, which has been very tricky. That child hasn't had any funding yet. We're still waiting' (Early Years Lead, School 120).

Evidence-gathering and teacher workload

This section details how and why teacher workload changed or remained the same in comparison to teachers' experiences prior to the pilot. The changes made to evidence-gathering practices are a key

component of this and are discussed in detail. Additionally, the section examines the extent to which teachers felt confident in relying on their professional judgement and any other changes to workload as a result of the revised ELGs.

Approaches to evidence-gathering

Changes to evidence-gathering under the revised ELGs should be understood in the context of additional guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) provided to pilot schools. The DfE was aware that some early years teachers felt the need to collect extensive evidence about pupil progress, which created considerable additional workload for teachers. The behaviour of the pilot schools before the revised ELGs were introduced supports this picture: before the pilot began, the overwhelming view of pilot school teachers was that the collection of evidence was a requirement in their school for the completion of the EYFS profile. The majority of teachers also described the level of evidence collected to conduct EYFS profile assessments as 'too much'.

To address this, the DfE reasserted frequently in the pilot EYFS framework and the pilot EYFSP handbook that teachers should not be collecting or recording unnecessary evidence; instead they should be using their professional judgement to make assessments.

Types of evidence collected

Despite the guidance that teachers should not be collecting unnecessary evidence, teachers nevertheless continued to collect and record a range of different types of evidence throughout the year.

The approaches taken to evidence-gathering, however, differed considerably to those taken in previous years, with a general shift away from physical forms of evidence being reported by schools. Teachers instead relied more on other evidence sources such as the observation of children without formally recording these and discussions with other teachers, including anecdotal evidence of when a child has met the criteria for an ELG.

'They're just more naturally learning what those children can do, without having to be looking for it through a screen and trying to capture it as a photograph' (Headteacher, School 103).

Where physical evidence was collected, it was largely done so less frequently and more concisely. Examples of this include taking an occasional photo or writing a brief note on a post-it note rather than longer, more time-consuming write-ups of formal observations or other methods.

'It's more of a post-it note on their assessment sheet and we just keep evidence that way, and I have found that that's been easier for both myself and the TA' (Teacher, School 104).

Staff also reported taking a more child-led approach in the use of physical forms of evidence and making greater use of children's workbooks and examples of children's work. These teachers felt that this type of evidence alone would suffice for moderation and therefore decided against producing any additional documents or collecting other forms of physical evidence.

Tools, materials and frameworks

In order to effectively and efficiently record evidence and track children's development throughout the year, teachers considered a number of potential approaches. Online and offline learning journals had, in previous years, been considered an effective way of doing this, and indeed, one approach was to continue using this method. A second approach, however, was to develop new evidence-gathering tools that would be better suited to the changes made to evidence-gathering requirements.

One approach was to continue using online or offline learning journals. Online journals were perceived as a valuable tool to communicate with parents—teachers felt that parents enjoyed being able to access these and feel more involved in their children’s learning and development as a result. A second reason for continuing the use of learning journals, however, related to teachers feeling hesitant about changing their evidence-gathering practices and uncertainty as to how much or what evidence to collect. These teachers therefore decided to err on the side of caution by continuing with similar practices as in previous years, including the use of online learning journals.

However, an alternative approach was to stop using online and offline journals and develop new evidence-gathering tools. This was spurred on by the guidance not to collect unnecessary evidence and the consequential reduction in physical forms of evidence being collected. Teachers associated completing learning journals with a high workload. Writing up, uploading, and tracking evidence took up a large amount of teacher time. The push away from using learning journals was further exacerbated by the fact that third-party online learning journals that had been used in the past were organised according to the previous ELGs and *Development Matters* making this method of recording evidence less appropriate for the revised ELGs.

As a result, teachers who decided to no longer use learning journals due to the revised ELGs came up with a number of new approaches to collecting evidence, developing new tools of varying levels of complexity. One approach was similar to the approach taken in previous years: teachers created simplified versions of learning journals, with some recording all evidence relating to a child on a single piece of paper; others used one sheet of paper per child per term or half term. A second approach was to put together books or recording systems to document important interactions with children or similar forms of evidence. A third approach was to refer to *Development Matters* in order to match up stages of development exemplification statements with the revised ELGs. These matched up statements were then used to devise new progress tracking tools and assessment materials.

All practitioners who reported using the newly developed tools and frameworks throughout the year felt that they were an improvement on the previously used learning journals. They were felt to be effective for recording and tracking evidence whilst also resulting in a reduction in workload in regard to organising and writing up evidence.

Workload and time spent on evidence-gathering

Three overarching experiences were reported by teachers regarding their evidence-gathering workload. One group felt that their workload had reduced, a second felt that there were no overall changes to their workload, while a third found that their workload in fact increased as a result of changes to guidance about evidence-gathering. Those who did not report having a reduced workload either had not made significant changes to their evidence-collection practices, had continued to use time consuming learning journals, already had a low workload, or had to create new materials to address the revised ELGs but expected this to reduce going forward.

Reduced workload

With the introduction of new approaches to evidence-gathering, teachers reported experiencing a resulting reduction in their workload. One experience reported by teachers was that they were collecting less evidence overall, instead focusing on key markers of progress as opposed to collecting for the sake of collecting. Where evidence was collected, teachers reported it being of higher quality. Furthermore, teachers reported that not only was the workload more manageable but that the evidence collected was more useful for assessments as teachers no longer had to trawl through piles of evidence as they had done in previous years.

Discontinuing the use of learning journals was reported as being a key factor in reducing workload and saving time. Teachers felt that they were no longer documenting excessively or uploading evidence that wasn't necessarily helpful or useful as a result.

'Just by not doing those learning journals I've saved a lot of time, but I haven't then lost anything, I haven't missed out on any children's development, and I still feel strongly that I know the children well' (Teacher, School 104).

Those who continued to use learning journals, also reported a reduction in workload and found that they were recording and uploading less evidence than they had done in previous years. They also reported that they were no longer writing detailed observation notes or documenting 'next steps' and objectives for children for every observation that was uploaded. Instead, they felt that they were more able to focus on the child's actions alone.

'We have reduced what's gone down into their [learning] journeys. We've got so much knowledge in our head about each child, we could sit there and talk all day about them, and actually, that's what it comes down to [in] the end ... It's what you know about that child—how in-depth you've gone with them' (Teacher, School 121).

A similar workload to previous years

Some schools reported that their workload related to evidence-gathering was about the same as in previous years. There were three key reasons for this:

One explanation reported by teachers was that they were already collecting considerably less evidence than is common among other schools. Here, the consensus was that collecting large amounts of evidence is an unnecessary practice, with the use of professional judgement taking precedence. These teachers were therefore already relying more on their professional judgement and so did not make any significant changes to their evidence-gathering practices.

A second reason reported by teachers was that while they had indeed reduced the amount and types of evidence they were collecting, this was offset by the time spent putting together new tools, materials, and frameworks at the start of the year. With the new materials and tools now in place, they expected their overall workload to reduce in future years.

A final reason related to teachers feeling hesitant about making changes to their evidence-gathering practices. There was some concern as to how any changes made would affect the children and their learning. As such, these teachers continued to record evidence largely as it had been done in previous years.

'The only things I'm worried about is what's going to make a difference to the children and what's actually going to improve their learning. So I personally didn't make a huge amount of changes' (Early Years Lead, School 118).

Despite this, this group did report feeling less fixated on evidence-gathering and being more selective over what they recorded. It was felt that although they were initially instinctively looking for examples of evidence to record, over time, they became more accustomed to simply letting things happen and learning not to overdo or overthink any evidence. Practitioners held a positive view of this process and felt that although it took some time to adapt, the new state of being less fixated on evidence-gathering reflected how evidence-gathering practices should be in the classroom.

Increase in workload

In contrast, an increase in workload was reported by a group of teachers that continued to use online learning journals. These teachers were faced with the obstacle of recording and linking evidence through a third-party online learning journal which had been set up to correspond with the previous ELGs. It was therefore not possible to link evidence in the same way that had been done previously. Teachers instead spent more time writing up detailed notes which were then uploaded to the learning journal.

It is important to note, however, that among schools where an increase in workload was reported, teachers also felt that they collected less evidence than other schools tended to. This would suggest that while their personal workload may have increased, it is nevertheless likely to be lower than that typically seen in other schools.

Views on evidence-gathering

This section explores the range of views that were expressed by teachers regarding the guidance in the pilot documents that they should not collect unnecessary evidence. Although a small number of concerns were raised, teacher views were nevertheless predominantly positive.

'I think that overall, we felt that collecting a different kind of evidence in a different kind of way has been more effective, and has actually been a better use of time, certainly for our school and for our staff' (Headteacher, School 103).

Positive views

Teachers reported being under less pressure and appreciated being able to approach evidence-gathering in their own way. One view held by teachers was that their evidence-gathering practices in previous years had largely been driven by the need to justify themselves when it came to moderation at the end of the year rather than any actual need to collect evidence in order to determine children's progress and development. This pressure was therefore largely removed by not having to attend external moderation and through the confirmation that teacher knowledge and judgement would be considered sufficient forms of evidence.

'We're still observing the children. We're interacting with them, we're asking them the key questions, but we're not feeling the pressure to record every little thing.' (Assistant Head/Early Years Lead, School 122)

One viewpoint was that teachers felt both trusted and valued as a result of being allowed to rely on their professional judgement. These teachers appreciated the fact that confidence in their judgement and ability had been expressed through the revised ELGs.

Among those who experienced a reduction in workload due to the change in their approach to evidence-gathering, many valued the additional time they were able to spend with the children as a result. This increased contact time led to teachers feeling more involved with class activities and consequently feeling as though they had a better memory of children's actions, which allowed them to make better judgements regarding their ability and progress.

Similarly, an additional experience reported by teachers was that of being able to develop stronger relationships with the children. This was the result of having the freedom to enjoy the moments spent with children rather than worrying about taking photos or collecting other forms of evidence.

Concerns

One concern raised by headteachers was that less hardworking or inexperienced teachers might not collect any evidence if it was not formally required of them. As a result, they might struggle to determine how a child has developed across the year. However, it should be noted that this concern was raised purely on a hypothetical level and that no teachers or headteachers experienced this within their own schools.

A further concern was that of knowing how much evidence to collect. In particular, one view was that there was not sufficient guidance on what constituted 'necessary evidence' and teachers were therefore unsure about what evidence to collect.

'The guide says ... there's no longer a requirement to have multiple sources of written or photographic evidence and not to record unnecessary evidence. But it's then sort of, "okay, well, what is necessary?'" (Headteacher, School 122).

A degree of apprehension was expressed among schools that decided to discontinue the use of learning journals as to how parents would feel about their absence, given that they are often used as a means of sharing children's development with parents. However, it was later noted that parents either actually did not notice the change or that they were content with the smaller amount of evidence they were shown at parents' evening.

Use of professional judgement and teacher self-confidence

Teacher self-confidence

At the start of the school year, mixed views were expressed regarding the transition to relying on professional judgement. Teachers reported having felt confident in anticipation of relying on their judgement, while other views raised points of concern. These concerns included whether they would have enough evidence to form valid assessments at the end of the year and whether they would be able to speak about a child in the same amount of detail as they have done in previous years.

These concerns, however, were temporary, with no teachers reporting any detrimental outcomes as a result of the changes later in the year. In fact, all teachers felt confident in forming and making their judgements and did not feel that having less physical evidence affected their ability to assess children who they knew just as well as they had done in previous years. Many felt that having had lots of experience working in early years meant they were well prepared for relying on their own professional judgements.

Perception of other practitioners' confidence and ability

In addition to teachers feeling confident in their own professional judgement, they also expressed a similar level of confidence in other practitioners within their own institutions. This view was also shared by headteachers across all school types.

'I think that the fact that these are professional people, they know what they're doing and we can trust their judgements, reflects our opinion of the staff that we have got' (Deputy Headteacher, School 120).

'I'm confident that my teachers there are very knowledgeable about the EYFS curriculum and I am confident in their judgements' (Headteacher, School 121).

One view held by teachers was that teaching assistants are similarly capable and confident in using their professional judgement. Having had considerable experience as a teaching assistant—or in early years—was thought to be a key reason for their capability. Some, however, disagreed arguing that as teaching assistants were called on less frequently to make such professional judgements

their confidence to do so varied. This viewpoint, however, did not relate to the perception of their ability: it was felt that they would be more confident with practice and experience through working with, and being around, experienced teachers.

While all teachers felt confident in the ability of practitioners within their own schools, some worried that less experienced teachers or NQTs might not have the same confidence or ability.

'I think it does require highly-skilled early years practitioners to be able to do that' (Assistant Head of Early Years, School 116).

'I'm lucky that the staff are very confident and experienced in what they're doing, but if you've got someone ... that isn't as experienced ... would they know how to get the children to where they need to be? ... I'd worry that a lot wouldn't' (Headteacher, School 102).

As they have less experience with children in early years, there was a view that NQTs might not have the necessary knowledge to be able to determine the level of development expected for children through the year and therefore would struggle with forming their judgements. This could be particularly challenging when making a judgement regarding a child who might be crossing into 'exceeding'.

These concerns were not, however, reflected by the NQTs themselves. In fact, NQTs reported feeling more confident in their judgements as they felt that they knew the children better due to not having to spend as much time gathering evidence as they had done previously.

Despite a widely felt confidence in the ability of teachers to form accurate judgements about children's development, concerns were raised as to how judgements would be reached in a teacher's absence. This situation could arise if a teacher were to leave school suddenly or fall sick during the year. Without physical evidence to indicate progress, a replacement teacher may not be well placed or sufficiently informed to form their own judgements. However, teachers nevertheless felt confident that sufficient knowledge of each child would be held across the early years team for an accurate group decision to then be made.

External expectations

While teachers may have felt confident relying on their own judgement, they were not certain their judgement would be considered sufficient by bodies such as Ofsted as well as by other teachers during external moderation.

'I think people still find it very frightening to say, "this is what I think", and to have that accepted as enough, it's quite frightening for them' (Early Years Lead, School 118).

This concern was raised in relation to a pre-existing culture of evidence and the external expectation that teachers will track and document progress extensively. It was felt that this expectation may persist despite the formal changes being made to the early years guidelines. Additional guidelines for external bodies may therefore have to be produced or updated if teachers are to feel confident that their professional judgements would be considered valid by others outside their teams.

Other changes to workload

While the majority of the changes to workload reported by teachers were in relation to the changes made to their approaches to evidence-gathering, additional changes to workload in other areas were reported.

Preparation time and revising classroom practice

Mixed experiences were reported in terms of the amount of time spent planning for and preparing lessons. One view was that the revised ELGs are more straightforward to teach and involve more discussion-based and other similar activities with the class, which require less planning than in previous years—that the required planning is less in-depth.

In terms of planning changes to content to fit the revised ELGs, one view reported by teachers was that it did not take any additional time. Most of what needed to be included was already covered within the classroom, so few changes had to be made.

'I feel like it's such a flexible environment that you find you're already teaching those things. Not necessarily through sitting down and teaching them; you feel like these things already happen just in the environment that you've created and the practice that you have' (Teacher, School 104).

Others, however, redesigned all of their content for it to be appropriate for the revised ELGs. This involved considerable amounts of additional work that in some cases offset the reductions in workload due to collecting less evidence (see the Evidence and Workload section for more detail on this).

A further issue was experienced by teachers who used an online maths tool to guide and plan their teaching. This software was not in line with the revised ELGs and despite considerable time and effort attempting to resolve this with the software developer, a solution was not found as to how to go about teaching this area. Those who raised this issue stated that they would expect it to be resolved when the revised ELGs were rolled out more widely allowing third parties to update their tools accordingly.

Moderation

Exemption from external moderation led to schools generally spending less time on moderation. The reduction in the amount of evidence-gathering also meant that less time was consequently spent examining physical evidence. Where teachers spent more time on moderation compared to previous years, the increase in workload was attributed to adjusting to a new process and was expected to fall in future years.

Assessment

One view was that workload had reduced as teachers had gathered less paperwork and other physical documents which, in turn, reduced the time it took to complete assessment and observation sheets.

In contrast, other teachers felt that the time spent on assessment did not change as a result of the revised ELGs. Others felt that it took longer as they were adapting to the new processes or having to decide how to approach it without guidance being provided. The creation of assessment tools and the devising of baseline measures at the start of the year, however, was cited as the main reason for additional time being needed.

Interpreting ELGs

One view was that teachers had sufficient opportunities to ask any questions about the ELGs at the training day and did not need to spend any additional time interpreting them later in the year.

Another view was that interpreting ELGs took up a lot of their time throughout the year and cited as a reason for this the lack of support and guidance available outside of the school. To address this, meetings and discussions took place throughout the year for teachers to come together and talk through

their interpretation of ELGs. This time was used to come to a consensus within a school as to how best to interpret the ELGs, but teachers remained uncertain as to whether their interpretations were correct.

Children needing more support

No differences in time spent on children needing more support were found to occur as a result of the revised ELGs.

EYFS Profile

This section discusses teachers' experiences of creating the final profile after the introduction of the revised ELGs. This includes discussion on the accuracy of assessments under the revised ELGs, making best fit judgements, moderating the final profiles, and readiness for Key Stage 1.

Accuracy of assessments using the revised ELGs

After teachers had assessed children using the revised ELGs, they provided feedback on the accuracy of assessments compared to the previous ELGs. However, it is important to note that some of the issues raised could have been applied to the previous ELGs. The revised ELGs were felt to improve the accuracy of assessments in a number of ways and were described as specific and precise making them easier to understand and assess. Some specific areas of the ELGs also improved the accuracy of assessments for children with English as an additional language. For instance, splitting reading into comprehension and word reading helped accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of children with EAL.

However, a number of concerns were raised about the accuracy of the revised assessments. These have been divided into issues that relate to specific ELGs, overall concerns, and concerns about the accuracy of assessments for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Concerns about specific ELGs

There were concerns about the accuracy of assessments for the ELG for writing and the 'personal, social and emotional development' area of learning.

As discussed in the Implementation of the Revised ELGs section, there was some confusion when a school used a teaching scheme that did not map onto the revised ELGs well—when, for example, schools used a phonic system that required children to know far fewer than ten diagraphs by the end of reception. The issue of conflict between teaching approaches and the revised ELGs was raised again in relation to accuracy of assessments. There was a query around whether, if a school teaches pre-cursive handwriting, if the '*write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed*' could refer to pre-cursive letters.

Teachers felt uncertain when interpreting the self-regulation ELG; for example, could children achieve 'expected' for this ELG if they were receiving interventions such as a Behaviour Plan to support these skills? Staff felt that the descriptor provided little clarity as to the extent to which children were required to demonstrate these skills:

'How much attention do you want them to pay to you?! Where's the line in pay attention to the teacher? Is it that they can look at you for two minutes and listen to what you're saying?'
(Headteacher, School 104).

There were also queries around whether a child needed to exhibit certain behaviour when unsupervised, or whether they could be considered 'expected' if they demonstrated the required behaviour under supervision. It appears that these concerns could also be applied to the previous ELGs.

Another ELG from the personal, social and emotional development area that raised concern was 'managing self'. Teachers felt it would be difficult to assess '*explain the reasons for rules and know right from wrong*' as a child may know right from wrong, but not act accordingly. Teachers were unclear how to assess a child if this were the case.

Overall concerns

The overall issues raised about the accuracy of assessments cover risk of variation between schools, accuracy of the ELGs as a tool for understanding a child's development, assessing SEND children, assessing shy children, and concerns with accuracy that mirror concerns with interpreting ELGs.

Teachers expressed concerns about the risk of variation in assessments between schools. The revised ELGs were felt to leave room for interpretation—that different schools might interpret the ELGs differently. Due to this, teachers were concerned that their assessments may not be accurate in comparison to other schools.

'If your child's "expected", what's your idea of "expected" because the school down the road should have the same idea, "expected", as the school across the country should have the same idea as "expected" for going into Year 1, because we've all got the same curriculum'
(Early Years Lead, School 107).

This was a particular concern because teachers did not have access to exemplification materials and 'exceeding' descriptors for the revised ELGs. Teachers felt the lack of these materials increased the risk of inconsistencies in how children are assessed, especially when teachers were making best fit judgements.

Another concern was the accuracy of assessments under the new ELGs for children who are shy, lack confidence, or are not naturally forthcoming. With some ELGs, these children were felt to be at a disadvantage. This was particularly a problem for ELGs that required teachers to observe children speaking or communicating such as the 'communication and language' learning area and the ELG for comprehension. Teachers also remarked this may be a problem for assessing the ELGs under the personal, social and emotional development area of learning as children may not be confident enough to demonstrate their skills to the teacher or may be naturally less sociable. This was also felt to be a concern for accuracy of assessments under the ELG for performing. It was not clear whether this concern was specifically about the revised ELGs or if it would have also been a concern under the previous ELGs.

Issues were raised about the accuracy of the revised ELGs as a tool for understanding a child's development. Teachers noted that they thought the ELGs—which are intended to be used as an end-point measure at the end of the reception year—were not accurate for assessing children's level of development as they enter the reception class. Additionally, for children who are not considered 'expected' under the ELGs, the ELGs do not allow teachers to demonstrate which areas a child is not meeting the ELG in, or to track progress across the year. This relates primarily to teachers not having access to a version of *Development Matters* that matches the revised ELGs. This was due to the misalignment between *Development Matters* age brackets and new definitions of the 'expected' level of development under the revised ELGs. When using the previous version of ELGs, *Development Matters* allowed teachers to track the development stage a child entered the class at, and how they were progressing throughout the year.

Lastly, it appeared to be the case that teachers who struggled in terms of understanding certain ELGs also struggle with assessment for these ELGs as a result. For instance, the lack of clarity surrounding the phrase 'automatic recall' led to uncertainties when making assessments. One concern was exactly how automatic recall needed to be in order for pupils to achieve 'expected'. Concerns around

the accuracy of assessments stemming from problems with the understanding of the ELGs (discussed in the Understanding of the Revised ELGs section) applied to the:

- word reading ELG;
- mathematics area of learning;
- physical development area of learning;
- past and present ELG; and
- people, cultures and communities ELG.

Accuracy of assessments for children with SEND

Some concerns were raised about the accuracy of assessments under the revised ELGs for children with SEND.

The mismatch between the revised ELGs and *Development Matters* discussed above was felt to be a particular issue when assessing SEND children. During the pilot, schools that chose not to use the age brackets in *Development Matters* to guide their assessments found it difficult to demonstrate SEND children's progress. One approach taken to overcoming this challenge was to tailor assessments to SEND children's individual developmental goals, measuring improvement against these alongside the ELGs.

'How do you show that a child has moved on, when their steps are so minuscule, when you haven't even got bigger steps to look at? We're having to look at things like children's speech and language, the programmes that they're given to develop their speech ... but it is very challenging to still demonstrate how much progress they've made towards the Early Learning Goal' (Headteacher, School 120).

Due to issues with evidencing SEND children's development across the year through assessment, teachers felt this meant that children's progress was overlooked, rather than recognised and rewarded. Furthermore, some difficulties were reported when attempting to assess SEND children against specific ELGs, including the PSED area of learning and the literacy area of learning.

Regarding literacy, the writing ELG was felt to be hard to assess for children with SEND as teachers were unsure if there was an implicit requirement that writing needs to make sense. For instance, children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder may write phrases and sentences that are well formed in terms of letters and words, but do not make sense. There was a lack of clarity about whether such a child could achieve an 'expected' outcome for this ELG. It was also suggested that the comprehension ELG is difficult to assess for pupils with SEND, particularly those with autism. There were also concerns about assessing deaf children using the listening ELG.

One view expressed was that the new descriptors in fact disadvantaged SEND children due to the expectations of the PSED ELGs. These were felt to be very challenging for some SEND children, when compared to the previous ELGs. As a result, teachers who expressed this view felt uncomfortable that some children with SEND performed more poorly under the pilot ELGs:

'Our SEN children have probably not made as much progress as the others, but a lot of that is for PSHE because of their emotional development. So we've got a lot of ASD [Autistic Spectrum Disorder] children who haven't been able to show that they can wait their turn, or respect other children when they're moving, and follow the school rules and things like that' (Early Years Lead, School 124).

However, a contrasting view was expressed about assessing children with SEND under the revised ELGs—that assessing children with SEND who had a variety of different needs with a single

assessment tool designed around typical development has always been challenging. As such, this problem preceded the revised ELGs.

Best fit judgements

Making best fit judgements was a practice that teachers were familiar and comfortable with. Teachers' approach to making best fit judgements had not changed in principle due to the revised ELGs.

One view was that making best fit judgements was easier under the revised ELGs due to the use of bullet points rather than one sentence statements. Teachers also reported using best fit judgements to accommodate changes in the revised ELGs, for instance the tripod grip, and questioned whether the lack of this should mean a child did not reach 'expected' in fine motor skills.

However, there appeared to be some confusion over how to 'best fit' where numbers were concerned. For instance, the requirement to know 'ten diagraphs' raised the question as to whether a child knowing nine diagraphs could be described as 'expected'.

There was also some inconsistency observed with regard to how best fit judgements were made, particular around the approach to bullet points. There were two key approaches described:

Best fit across bullet points

- One approach was to give each child either 'emerging', 'expected', or 'exceeding' for each bullet point within the ELGs. There were then two approaches. A slightly more rigid approach was to not give a child 'expected' unless they were considered to have met all three strands of the ELG. This means pupils who had achieved two out of the three strands for an ELG were still considered 'emerging'. A different approach was to average out the outcomes given across the bullet points to create the final assessment outcome. So if a child was 'expected' for two of the three bullets, they would be best fit as 'expected' overall.

Best fit across the whole ELG

- The second approach was to take each ELG as a whole and give a child a classification based on an overall judgement of the child's development. For instance, one teacher noted that if they felt a child would have reached 'expected' if they'd stayed in reception for a few weeks longer, they would use best fit to judge them as 'expected'. Some of those who took this approach still collected an outcome for each of the bullet points of the ELG but did not necessarily use the average of the outcomes to decide the overall outcome.

Moderation

This section considers pilot schools' approaches to moderation under the revised ELGs. It covers how moderation was carried out internally, including who was involved, what was moderated and the use of evidence. It also considers moderation between schools; LA moderation and teachers' views of moderation. During the pilot schools were informed by DfE that they should not take part in LA moderation or school-to-school moderation.¹⁴

Internal moderation

Internal moderation consisted of a series of formal and informal meetings and discussions between staff. There was a degree of variation in how often such meetings and discussions took place, ranging from moderating every half term, termly, or at irregular points in time when it was considered necessary.

¹⁴ These requirements were discussed at the training events discussed in the Methodology section.

Discussions often involved talking through specific examples of children's work. However, teachers also felt that it was necessary to talk through their interpretation of the ELGs and their descriptors to ensure that all teachers were following the same interpretation and assessing in the same way. This included reaching an internal consensus on what should constitute the boundaries between 'expected', 'emerging', and 'exceeding' grades.

One experience of internal moderation reported by teachers was that they did not have the capability they had in previous years to focus on and moderate examples of children's work. This was a result of the additional time and effort spent clarifying and interpreting the ELGs within school.

'It has literally just been myself, the TA, and the headteacher just being, "What do you think this is? What do you think this means?" That has just been the extent of my moderation' (Teacher, School 104).

Other practitioners, however, felt that the internal process of moderation was either the same or largely the same as the approach taken in previous years. They did not report it being negatively affected by the revised ELGs or having to make any substantial changes to their overall approach.

'We've just done the same as we would normally do, have a look at the work, talk about the children, talk about what they can do and ... go back and look at the ELG statements and really just make a decision either way' (Early Years Lead and Assistant Head, School 122).

Who was involved?

Moderation predominantly took place internally within the early years team, with the school headteacher also being involved. Staff noted that teaching assistants (TAs) had greater involvement in the moderation process compared to previous years. In part, this was due to the value placed on their professional judgement and their knowledge of the children, and one experience was that teachers had more time to include TAs in the process due to the time saved as a result of being exempt from local authority moderation.

'All the adults in there have a lot to do with all of the children, so they're all highly-valued, and their opinion, when it comes to moderation' (Early Years Lead, School 107).

One approach was to involve Year 1 teachers. This either happened at the end of the year at the final point of data collection or termly. It was considered helpful to include Year 1 teachers towards the end of the year in order to determine whether children's progress was in line with what is expected of them in the autumn term of Year 1 or whether there were gaps in their learning. At times, senior Key Stage 1 leaders were included in the process to help identify any children who should be classed as 'exceeding' according to the revised ELGs.

Although nursery staff were not typically involved in moderation, their input was considered within schools that had a higher level of cross-team involvement more generally.

What was moderated?

Among schools with a small reception class, it was possible to look at examples of all the children within the class. Among larger classes, however, a number of different selection methods were used to decide who and what to include in moderation. These different approaches included:

- a selection of children graded 'emerging', 'expected', and 'exceeding';
- a selection of children who were performing well and those whom teachers were unsure of;
- only moderating one child but moderating them thoroughly in each area; and
- a selection of children with the same outcome who were in different reception classes and were assessed by different teachers.

As a result of the revised ELGs and the guidance that teachers should not collect unnecessary evidence, teachers reported relying less on physical evidence and more on each other's knowledge and judgement. This was not felt to negatively influence professional judgements; workbooks and conversations with colleagues were felt to be sufficient for moderation.

'We've still had books, so we've still got our writing book, we've still got our maths book, so if I'm asking about writing, is this a one, two or a three, I've just been showing books and things like that. I haven't felt like I'm a bit like, "Oh, I haven't got anything to show for that." I still felt I've got sufficient evidence' (Teacher, School 104).

Moderation with other schools

Despite guidance during the pilot that schools should not moderate in clusters, one of the approaches to moderation among pilot schools was to moderate with other non-pilot schools. In cases where schools decided to engage in moderation with other local schools, teachers generally found the process to be of limited usefulness. Given that the external schools were not familiar with the revised ELGs, they were consequently not well enough informed to be able to assist with moderation decisions. However, teachers did report that it was helpful to have contact time with other schools, despite the process not being helpful for moderation specifically.

Local authority moderation

Despite pilot schools being exempt from LA moderation, there were instances where schools did take part in LA moderation. In these cases, schools had carried out limited formal moderation processes in previous years and took part in LA moderation at the request of the school improvement officer.

Views on moderation

Teachers considered the approach to moderation to be largely similar to that taken in previous years. As a result, few issues arose relating to moderation practices, and teachers were generally confident in the judgements made.

'Although the Early Learning Goals have changed, at the end of the day good teaching and good practice in the Early Years is something that we all know, we've done it before.' (Early Years Lead, School 118).

It was widely felt that staff were able to make judgements consistently within school. A greater degree of uncertainty, however, was expressed as to whether judgements made internally would be in line with interpretations and judgements made by other schools. This was considered a particular issue when deciding what constituted an 'exceeding' grade. Without cross pilot school moderation teachers were unable to resolve these concerns.

This perspective was reiterated in the view that LA moderation would allow schools to benefit from an outside view or fresh perspective on internal practices. There was some concern that without LA moderation, schools would be limiting the range of views incorporated into their practice.

'I don't feel when you keep it in-house that necessarily you're getting a balanced picture, because you're only getting your view' (Early Years Lead, School 101).

'I do think that local authority moderation should be kept, just to oversee it really. Otherwise, you're going to be, you're in danger of it looking different in every school' (Early Years Lead, School 107).

It was felt that LA moderation could be particularly important for NQTs and less experienced teachers and that they would be more likely to struggle without it. Indeed, among the NQT respondents who did

in fact attend LA moderation, it was reported to be a useful and reassuring experience, leaving the NQT feeling confident that they had made good and appropriate decisions as to how to implement the revised ELGs across the year. This mirrors views before the introduction of the revised ELGs, where the overwhelming view among pilot schools was that statutory moderation was important.

An alternative view, however, was that LA moderation is generally not helpful or useful and therefore not needed. It was felt that teachers have a better understanding of the children in their class than external teachers who attend local or LA moderation and that little support is typically offered when attending LA moderation. However, among those who felt LA moderation is not helpful a view was expressed that it offers a beneficial opportunity for professional dialogue. This opportunity would be lost were the exemption from LA moderation to continue.

Readiness for Key Stage 1

Before the start of the pilot, the overwhelming view of teachers in pilot schools was that the current EYFS profile inaccurately reports on the readiness of pupils for KS1. The findings described below concerning readiness for KS1 under the revised ELGs should be understood in the light of this view.

There were three key views of how the revised ELGs would affect readiness for KS1: that they would not affect readiness for KS1, that they would improve it, and that they would lead to children being unready for KS1. Teachers discussed readiness for KS1 both generally and in relation to specific ELGs, which is reflected below.

The revised ELGs will not affect readiness for Key Stage 1

One view was that the revised ELGs would not affect readiness for KS1. Teachers who held this view stated that the ELGs had not changed enough to affect readiness for KS1 or that children would have achieved the same outcome for the ELGs whether or not the revised ELGs were in place.

The revised ELGs will improve readiness for Key Stage 1

A second view was that the revised ELGs better prepared children for KS1. It was felt that the improved clarity of the descriptors meant the handover process with Year 1 teachers was easier, and Year 1 teachers would find it easier to see what had been achieved and where to offer children extra support. Teachers also noted that the revised ELGs complement the KS1 curriculum, particularly in areas within 'understanding the world', which meant the revised ELGs would improve children's readiness of Key Stage 1. The increased focus on basic skills in the ELGs was also felt to give children a firm foundation of knowledge going in to KS1.

Teachers also discussed specific areas of learning and specific ELGs that they felt would improve children's readiness for KS1:

- Mathematics: teachers felt the move to understanding numbers to 10, rather than to 20, allowed children to gain a deeper understanding of numbers.

'We can take more time to develop a more basic understanding of different subjects and they just have a firmer foundation of knowledge and skills that help them in Year 1' (Teacher, School 115).

Another view was that the mathematics ELGs were better aligned with KS1 expectations. While automatic recall of number bonds was controversial, one view was that as children were able to automatically recall number bonds as they entered Year 1, this meant Year 1 teachers could start teaching the reasoning behind the number bonds, rather than having to start from scratch. Teachers also felt the revised mathematics ELG made it easier for Year 1 teachers to understand the level children were at as they started Year 1.

- Literacy: teachers felt the greater focus on comprehension and books in the revised ELGs improved children's readiness for KS1. Teachers felt the split between comprehension and word reading gave comprehension skills more significance, lead to a more accurate assessment of children's development, and allowed Year 1 teachers to pinpoint where a child's strengths and weakness are in literacy.
- Physical development: dividing physical development into fine and gross motor skills was felt to give Year 1 teachers a more accurate picture of children's physical development.
- Self-regulation: the addition of this ELG helped teachers know where a child's development is in this area before they move into Year 1.
- Understanding the world and expressive arts and design: these ELGs were considered better aligned with KS1 than the previous ELGs.

The revised ELGs may be detrimental for readiness for Key Stage 1

A key concern expressed was that schools might not teach aspects of the previous ELGs that were no longer in the revised ELGs. This was felt to be a particular risk among inexperienced teachers. Those who held this view felt that if these aspects of the previous ELGs were not taught this would lead to gaps when children reached Year 1. This was a particular concern for 'shape space and measure', which was excluded from the revised ELG. While no school suggested that they had, or would, stop teaching aspects of the previous ELGs, schools did acknowledge that they had given these areas less attention or covered them in less depth than they would have done previously.

'We have taught [shape, space and measure] ... because we've found some pockets of time to do it ... but they have not had what we would have done previously' (Early Years Lead, School 118).

A second concern about readiness for KS1 was that 'expected' and 'exceeding' were open to interpretation. It was felt this might create inconsistency in the number of children achieving these levels as children move into KS1. One solution for this problem was to involve Year 1 teachers in the moderation process.

'I think it's going to create a higher need for that cross-phase collaboration' (Assistant Head, School114).

The third main concern about readiness for KS1 was the lack of supporting materials to accompany the revised ELGs. If a child does not achieve 'expected' on the revised ELGs, teachers felt they would have very little information to pass on to the Year 1 teacher to demonstrate a child's current level of development. Under the previous ELGs, teachers would use the 'ages and stages' of *Development Matters* to provide Year 1 teachers with a more detailed picture so the teacher knew which areas to focus on.

Teachers also discussed specific areas of learning and ELGs that they felt would have a negative impact on children's readiness for KS1:

- Mathematics: while one view was that the revised mathematics ELG would better prepare children for KS1 (discussed above), there was an alternative view. Teachers expressed concern that children did not have an established recall of number bonds and did not understand the mechanism behind number bonds. There was also concern that Year 1 teachers were going to have to cover new areas, including numbers 11 to 20, and mathematical problem solving. Concern was also expressed about the omission of shape space and measure, which teachers felt would leave children without the necessary mathematical language for KS1. However, the concern about the removal of shape space and measure was not universal.
- Literacy: teachers felt that the ELGs for reading and writing are less challenging than the previous ELGs. For instance, one view was that children would far surpass the requirement to know ten digraphs. This was problematic for readiness for KS1 because more children would achieve the revised ELG than previously. This would have implications for Year 1 staff, particularly if they are expected to demonstrate continued achievement in reading and writing.

Conclusions

Key conclusions

1. Participants viewed the revised ELGs positively overall, describing them as clearer than previous ELGs. They also made practical suggestions about improving the revised ELGs.
2. Schools reported that their workload had reduced due to the reduced expectations for assessment and evidence-gathering (or would do once the changes were embedded). Staff reported using this extra time to spend with children.
3. The revised ELGs by themselves were not felt to be sufficient: teachers wanted supporting materials, such as exemplification and curriculum guidance. (The intention is that these will be provided when the ELGs are rolled out nationally.)
4. There were mixed views about whether children would be better prepared for Key Stage 1 as a result of the changes, and about whether the new ELGs were more or less challenging than before. Follow-up research would be required to investigate this further.
5. Teachers welcomed using their own judgement and felt empowered to do so. However, some felt that external moderation would still be important for ensuring consistency between schools, and for gaining alternative perspectives.

Overall understanding

The revised ELGs—as well as the removal of the ELGs for technology and shapes, space and measures—were accepted by teachers; they were viewed as clearer, although there are some areas where teachers wanted clarification of the phrasing or meaning. Mathematics and ‘understanding the world’ were two areas of learning where greater clarity or further guidance would be particularly helpful for teachers.

Inconsistencies emerged throughout the evaluation about teacher’s understanding of the role of the revised ELGs.

Goals versus progress tracker

Teachers’ request for a version of *Development Matters* that aligns with the revised ELGs centred on having a way to track children’s progress. This may in part explain the criticism by teachers that the revised ELGs may not be wholly appropriate for children as they enter reception. While the ELGs are designed to assess children’s development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers appeared to be using them also to track progress throughout the year. Further guidance may be needed when the revised ELGs are rolled out to clarify that the ELGs are not intended for tracking progress across the reception year.

Goals versus curriculum

There was some confusion about whether or not the ELGs are ‘the curriculum’. This led to discrepancies in how teachers taught content. As discussed in the section on Understanding the Revised ELGs, there were two contrasting views. One view was that the ELGs did not constitute the early years curriculum. Teachers who held this view would still teach topics that were removed from the revised ELGs. The contrasting view was that the ELGs *are* the curriculum. This view led to teachers feeling that topics not included in the revised ELGs do not have to be taught.

Further guidance about the nature of the ELGs as an assessment tool rather than the early years curriculum may be necessary when the revised ELGs are rolled out.

Precision for assessment and moderation

The overall view was that the revised ELGs by themselves were not sufficient. Teachers wanted to have access to supporting materials which they had had for the previous ELGs. Four types of documentation were requested:

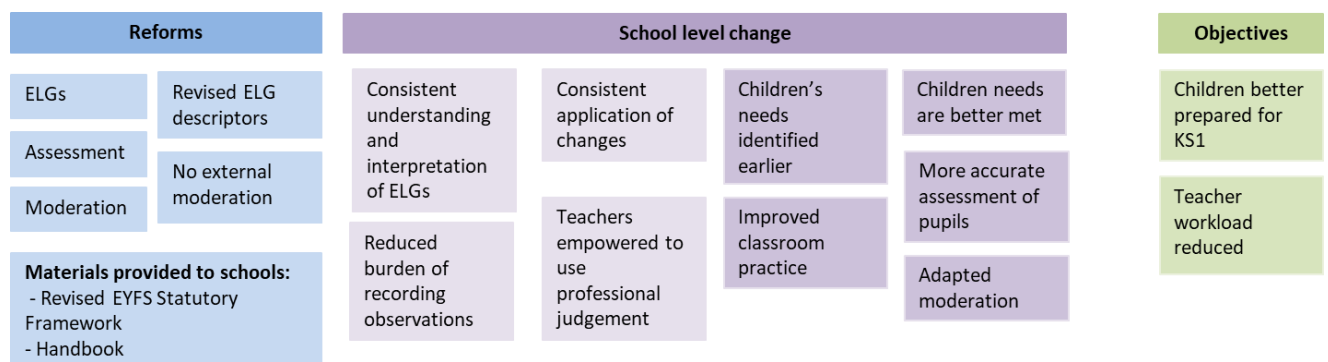
- Exemplification materials—to assist teachers in interpreting the ELGs where they felt there was a lack of clarity. Such materials would also reassure teachers that the interpretation they had made of the ELGs was correct. Without these materials teachers were concerned that there would be inconsistencies between schools in how children were assessed.
- Criteria for ‘exceeding’—to ensure consistency in judgements about the boundary between ‘expected’ and ‘exceeding’. Teachers were particularly concerned about the number of children that would be given the outcome of ‘exceeding’ if there was no clear guidance. It is worth noting here that there was a view among pilot schools that ‘exceeding’ as an outcome had been removed during the pilot. As such they did not give any of their children ‘exceeding’. Clearer guidance would be needed on this matter going forward to ensure a consistent approach across schools.
- **Suggestions for topics to cover**—to accompany the revised ELGs. This was particularly the case where ELGs had changed substantially, for instance ‘past and present’ and ‘people, culture and communities’. Teachers described that example topics would assist them in interpreting the ELGs and help them to create age-appropriate topics that would not overlap with content that would be covered in KS1.
- A revised *Development Matters* aligned to the revised ELGs. Since this resource was used extensively by pilot schools alongside the previous ELGs, a revised version is needed. Although it is non-statutory guidance, teachers heavily relied on it as a framework for:
 - tracking children’s progress;
 - understanding the stages of development for a child to achieve an ‘expected’ ELG outcome at the end of reception year; and
 - demonstrating progress for children who received ‘emerging’ as their ELG outcome.

Without a fully aligned *Development Matters* teachers found it harder to carry out these tasks.

Evidence to support the rationale for revising the ELGs

At project inception, NatCen developed a logic model setting out the outcomes the DfE was expecting from the revised ELGs. The final version of the logic model, presented below, was agreed with the DfE. This section reflects on whether there was any evidence emerging from the pilot to suggest that expected outcomes and objectives were achieved.

Figure 1: Logic model representing expected outcomes of the revised ELGs



Achieving objectives

The two main objectives of the revisions were to better prepare children for Key Stage 1 and to reduce the administrative burden on teachers.

Teachers' views about children being better prepared for KS1 were mixed. One view was that in some instances—for example, due to the changes in the mathematics ELGs—children would have a more solid foundation when starting KS1. Alongside this, there was some concern that due to some of the changes there may be children who reach the 'expected' level of development who are not fully prepared for KS1. To assess fully whether children were better prepared for KS1 as a result of the revised ELGs, further follow-up study of children would be needed.

The reduction in the burden of recording observations combined with the understanding they could use their own judgements meant that teachers found their workload in relation to the EYFS Profile had been reduced. Teachers reported using this time to spend with children instead of paperwork.

Achieving school-level change

The evaluation found that there were some areas where teachers expressed concern about understanding and interpreting the ELGs in a consistent way. They suggested changes to the wording of the ELGs, which are set out in the Main Findings section. The assumption would be that if the revisions suggested by teachers were made, teachers would find it easier to maintain consistency of interpretation and use.

Overall, there was a sense that teachers welcomed using their own judgement and felt empowered to do so. The evaluation found no evidence that:

- children's needs were identified earlier;
- that children's needs were better met; or
- that children were assessed more accurately.

There were reports of adapting classroom practice and refining or re-formulating lesson plans. However, it is important to note that no direct observations of classroom practice were made. Schools did carry out moderation in adapted ways and views on the removal of statutory moderation were mixed (reported below).

It is difficult to determine whether accuracy in assessment was achieved. Although teachers reported an improvement in accuracy across some descriptors and areas of learning, there was no consensus on achieving accuracy across any one ELG. It is therefore not possible to precisely determine how and where consistency in assessment was achieved.

This study provides some evidence on the set of outcomes established at the start of the evaluation. It is worth noting that within any evaluation design not everything can be measured. The evidence generated from this study is a contribution to the evidence base on ELG revisions and assessing children in the early years.

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Appendix A. Detailed Research Questions

Outcomes	Research Questions	Method	Indicator
Consistent understanding and interpretation of ELGs	Were the revised ELGs clear enough to be interpreted by participants in a consistent way? Were there any specific ELGs that were particularly clear or unclear? How could the content of these ELGs be improved to be clearer? What if anything would help to support the use of the revised ELGs and the scoring profile? (including changes to the handbook)	Autumn interviews and case studies + query log	Types of queries on AFC log Reported internal school discussions Views of the changes to ELG descriptors Interpretation of specific ELGS (using descriptors as an elicitation tool) Reported ease with which ELGs are applied to practice
Reduced burden of recording observations for assessment	How are teachers recording their observations? Is there a change in the amount of paperwork required (in comparison to previous years)? What can be done to minimise the burden of recording observations?	All methods	Examples of evidence gathered (if any) Reported time spent on evidence gathering in comparison to pre-pilot
Consistent application of changes	How easy was it to build the content of the revised ELGs into the programme of learning (and in what way(s) was this done)? Where were the areas of most change for classroom practice? How were any challenges addressed?	Autumn interviews & case studies	School discussion on how to use new ELGs
Teachers empowered to use professional judgement	How confident do teachers feel about conducting assessments using the revised ELGs? What was different in the way assessment was carried out? Have there been changes in the level of autonomy exercised by teachers? What is the perceived balance between teacher autonomy and oversight (i.e. moderation)	Case studies and end point interviews	Teacher reports of change in how much evidence is gathered Perceived confidence in using new ELG descriptors Perceptions of a autonomy
Children's needs identified earlier	In what way did the ELGs help to identify children's needs (earlier)? How does this compare with what happened previously?	Case studies and end point interviews	Reported examples of using ELGS to identify needs earlier
Improved classroom practice	In what ways has classroom practice changed in relation to the 17 ELGs? What specifically is done differently? How do early year leads/coordinators maintain consistency (if more than one Reception teacher)? What additional guidance, if any, would teachers find useful?	Case studies and end point interviews	Examples of improvements and challenges in the classroom in the application of ELGs
Children better supported in EYFS	Did the content of the ELGS help to better teach and support children? What changes were put in place to better support children? How has support for SEND and emerging SEND pupils changed?	Case studies and summer interviews	Reported examples of ways in which support has improved
More accurate assessment of pupils	Do teachers feel that the revised ELGs enabled them to make an accurate assessment of child's development (including a child with SEND), and was this considered to be more accurate than when using the previous ELGs descriptors? - If so, were there any particular ELGs for which this was the case, and why? - Were there any particular ELGs which did not enable an accurate assessment of development or which were less accurate than the previous ELGs, and why? What were the reasons for variations, if any, between participating schools and/or teachers? Is there anything that would help to make a more accurate summative assessment of development?	Summer interviews + query log	Teacher perceptions on accuracy when using ELGs for assessment
Adapted moderation	What do teachers think of statutory moderation by LAs (retrospective)? How helpful did they find statutory moderation? What forms of moderation has the school conducted in the past? What is planned for moderation during the pilot? How has this affected accuracy and workload? How was moderation conducted during the pilot? What would be the preferred type(s) of moderation? What type of additional support or guidance would schools want to help them with moderation?	All methods + query log	Views on LA and other forms of moderation (retrospective) Planning for moderation Examples of moderation during pilot Views on continuing moderation in assessment
Children better prepared for KS1	To what extent do teachers feel that children were better prepared for KS1? How was the profile used during handover to KS1 teachers?	Summer interviews	Perceptions of KS1 teachers (not in scope) Teachers descriptions of handover
Teacher workload reduced	Are teachers spending less time on assessment, recording evidence and moderation, than previously?	Survey and summer interviews	Reported estimates of time spent on assessment pre-pilot and during pilot

Appendix B. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)



Agreement to participate in the evaluation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile pilot

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this evaluation of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) pilot. The purpose of the following agreement is to outline the commitments of all parties involved.

Please sign both copies, retaining one, and hand the second copy to a NatCen representative. Alternatively post the second copy to Fatima Husain, 35 Northampton Square, London EC1V 0AX by July 2nd 2018.

School Name: _____

School Postcode: _____

Head teacher Name: _____

1. Aims of the Evaluation

The overall objective of the evaluation is to assess the delivery of the reforms and to provide evidence and insights into how implementation can be optimised when the reforms are rolled out nationally. The aims of the evaluation are to:

- understand how the EYFSP reforms affect staff workload, particularly in terms of trusting teachers to use their professional judgements in assessing development
- understand the delivery (understanding and interpretation) of the new materials
- explore the perceived clarity and precision of new ELGs and their descriptors and whether these facilitate or hinder assessment and moderation
- gather views on whether children are better prepared for KS1.

By participating in this research, you will make an important contribution to understanding how the reforms are being implemented before a full public consultation and national roll-out.

2. The evaluation Design

All schools taking part in the EYFSP pilot will be asked to take part in the evaluation. The research design involves four stages of data collection starting in July 2018 and concluding in July 2019. These stages are:

- **Stage 1:** A survey to be completed by each school to gather baseline data on current EYFSP practice and assessment – July 2018
- **Stage 2:** Interviews conducted over the telephone with a Reception year teacher or the EYFS Lead – Autumn term 2018
- **Stage 3:** In-depth research carried out in eight case study schools. These will be selected based on the school profile and emerging evidence from the evaluation. NatCen researchers will visit case study schools to conduct interviews with Reception staff and the headteacher - April-May 2019

- **Stage 4:** Interviews conducted over the telephone with a Reception year teacher or the EYFS Lead – July 2019.

3. School Responsibilities

3.1. Delivery of the EYFSP reforms

Pilot schools are expected to:

- implement the EYFSP reforms as specified by the DfE, using the pilot EYFS Framework document and pilot EYFS Handbook
- work closely with Action for Children, who will support implementation of the pilot, and share their experiences with NatCen (and potentially with other schools that are piloting reforms);
- attend information and training events in the summer 2018 term led by Action for Children:
 - Head teacher training event – Thursday 28 June 14:00-16:00, Central Hall, Westminster
 - Reception teacher training event (North) – Tuesday 10 July – 10:00-15:30 (networking from 9:30), Novotel Leeds
 - Reception teacher training event (South) – Wednesday 11 July – 10:00-15:30 (networking from 9:30), Holiday Inn Bloomsbury, London
- help develop and potentially test an alternative approach to moderation;
- communicate to parents and carers regarding participation in the pilot and the changes that will be involved in their child's Profile assessment i.e. based on a revised set of early learning goals;
- have their staffing arrangements agreed for the reception year 2018/19; and
- commit to participation for the full duration of the pilot, unless there is a significant reason for not doing so.

3.2. For the NatCen evaluation

- **Name a key contact (gatekeeper):** provide the contact details for a named contact (teacher or teaching assistant) at the school. This member of staff will be the main point of contact for the NatCen research team and will provide support to schedule and carry out evaluation tasks. A member of the senior management team at each school also needs to be appointed and named as a key contact.
- **Commit to taking part in all stages of the evaluation**, as specified above. This will require the Named Contact at the school to support completion of the survey, the scheduling of research tasks and facilitate the case study site visit (should the school be selected as a case study school).
- **Be responsive:** to NatCen requests for information and the completion of research tasks within the timeframe that has been agreed with EEF and the DfE.

4. NatCen Responsibilities

- Provide information about each stage of the research in a timely way allowing
- Be a point of contact for questions specifically about the evaluation.
- Collect and analyse the data from the project to provide an assessment to the DfE on the implementation of the EYFSP reforms. This will include analysis of a log of all school queries and AfC responses. This information will be confidential and anonymised.
- Write a report, published by EEF and DfE, on the findings of the project and disseminate research findings (through publication on NatCen website).
- No school, nor its staff or its pupils, will be identified in any of the research outputs. We will aim to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants in the research but some participants may be identifiable.

5. Action for Children responsibilities

- Provide support to school participating in the pilot. This will involve handling all queries submitted by schools and responding to schools in a timely way.

- Maintain a log of all queries received and AfC responses for analysis by NatCen.

6. Use of Data and GDPR

- All data will be treated with the strictest confidence. No individual school, nor its staff or pupils, will be identified in any report arising from the research.
- School identities will be shared with Ofsted, their relevant Local Authority and MPs.
- DfE is the data controller and NatCen is the data processor. The legal basis for this research is "public task". More information can be found in the privacy notice, appended to this document.

We commit to taking part in the evaluation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile pilot as detailed above.

Head teacher/Senior leader

Name:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

E-mail:

Named Contact (for NatCen evaluation)

Name:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

E-mail:

Telephone number:

Appendix C. ELG Change Map

Change map: Early Learning Goals

Early Learning Goals

The expectations for children’s development must ensure that cognitive development proceeds hand-in-hand with their social and personal development. The Early Learning Goals should not be used in any way to limit the wide variety of rich experiences that are crucial to child development, from being read to frequently to playing with friends.

Instead, the Early Learning Goals should support teachers¹ to make a holistic, best-fit judgement about a child’s progress, and their readiness for Year 1. They also support teachers to identify areas where children may be at risk of falling behind, so that rapid, effective support can be given.

When forming a judgement about whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, teachers should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement. This is sufficient evidence to assess a child’s individual level of development in relation to each of the Early Learning Goals. Multiple sources of written or photographic evidence are not required, and teachers should not record unnecessary evidence.

¹ Teacher should be understood to refer to any practitioner working with the child.

Area of learning	Current ELGs + descriptors	New (pilot) ELGs + descriptors	New (pilot) educational programme descriptions under 7 areas of learning.
<p>Communication and language</p>	<p><u>Listening and attention</u> Children listen in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.</p> <p><u>Understanding</u> Children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories and events</p> <p><u>Speaking</u> Children express themselves effectively showing awareness of listeners’ needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas and events.</p>	<p><u>ELG Listening:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen carefully and respond appropriately when being read to and during whole class and small group discussions; - Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding; - Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers. <p><u>ELG Speaking:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in small group, class and 1-to-1 discussions, offering their own ideas, using new vocabulary; - Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of new vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate; - Express their ideas using full sentences, with modelling and support from their teacher. 	<p>The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The quality and variety of language that children hear and speak throughout the day is crucial for developing their understanding, vocabulary and their ability to communicate effectively with others. By introducing new vocabulary through reading to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing children with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, all children have the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, story-telling and role-play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary. The frequency and depth of these daily exchanges, and the confidence that develops when children are involved in positive communication, are fundamental to their progress.</p>

<p>Physical development</p>	<p><u>Moving and handling</u> Children show good control and co-ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.</p> <p><u>Health and self-care</u> Children know the importance for good health of physical exercise, and a healthy diet, and talk about ways to keep healthy and safe. They manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs effectively, including dressing and going to the toilet independently.</p>	<p><u>ELG Gross Motor Skills:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others; - Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination; - Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing. <p><u>ELG Fine Motor Skills:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hold a pencil comfortably using the tripod grip; - Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paintbrushes and cutlery; - Show accuracy and care when drawing and copying. 	<p>Physical activity is important in children’s all-round development, and for enabling them to pursue healthy and active lives. Through opportunities to be active and interact with their environment, children develop coordination, control and precision of movement. Children need to develop strength and a love of exercise, as well as precision when using small tools correctly.</p>
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<p>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</p>	<p><u>Self-confidence and self-awareness</u> Children are confident to try new activities, and say why they like some activities more than others. They are confident to speak in a familiar group, will talk about their ideas, and will choose the resources they need for their chosen activities. They say when they do or don't need help.</p> <p><u>Managing feelings and behaviours</u> Children talk about how they and others show feelings, talk about their own and others' behaviour, and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable. They work as part of a group or class, and understand and follow the rules. They adjust their behaviour to different situations, and take changes of routine in their stride.</p> <p><u>Making relationships</u> Children play cooperatively, they take turns with others. They take account of one another's ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children.</p>	<p><u>ELG Self-Regulation:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, and regulate their behaviour accordingly; - Have a positive sense of self and show resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge; - Pay attention to their teacher and follow multi-step instructions. <p><u>ELG Managing Self:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing and going to the toilet; - Understand the importance of healthy food choices; - Explain the reasons for rules and know right from wrong. <p><u>ELG Building Relationships:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others; - Form positive attachments and friendships; - Show sensitivities to others' needs. 	<p>Children's personal, social and emotional development is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and should be developed hand-in-hand with their cognitive development. Children who can cooperate are more likely to develop a good opinion of themselves and others, and to be able to learn effectively in a group. These attributes support children to build friendships and important positive attachments, providing a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.</p>
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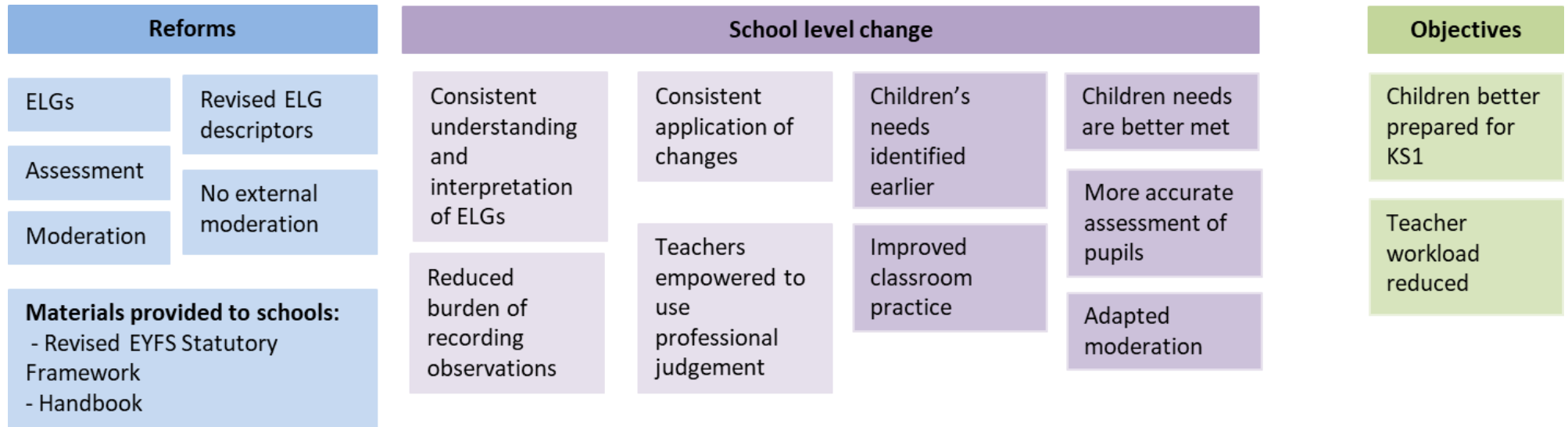
<p>Literacy</p>	<p>Reading Children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate understanding when talking with others about what they have read.</p> <p>Writing Children use their phonic knowledge to write words in a way which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.</p>	<p>ELG Comprehension: Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate understanding of what they have read and has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and new vocabulary; - Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems; - Use new vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role-play. <p>ELG Word Reading: Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs; - Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending; - Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including common exception words. <p>ELG Writing: Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed; - Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters; - Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others. 	<p>Reading consists of two dimensions: word reading and comprehension (both listening and reading). It is important to develop both aspects. Good language comprehension, necessary for both reading and writing, draws from linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. By listening and talking about stories, rhymes and poems, and non-fiction books children develop knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live. Skilled word reading involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing). It is also crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading; by reading books in class and demonstrating their own enjoyment, teachers will pass on the joy of reading.</p>
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<p>Mathematics</p>	<p><u>Numbers</u> Children can count reliably with numbers from 1 to 20, place them in order and say which number is one more or one less than a given number. Using quantities and objects, they add and subtract two single digit numbers and count on or back to find the answer. They solve problems, including doubling, halving and sharing.</p> <p><u>Shapes, space and measures</u> Children use every day language to talk about size, weight and capacity, position, distance, time and money to compare quantities and objects and to solve problems. They recognise, create and describe problems. They explore characteristics of everyday objects and shapes and use mathematical language to describe them.</p>	<p><u>ELG Number:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have an understanding of number to 10, linking names of numbers, numerals, their value, and their position in the counting order; - Subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5; - Automatically recall number bonds for numbers 0-5 and for 10, including corresponding partitioning facts. <p><u>ELG Numerical Patterns:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Automatically recall double facts up to 5+5; - Compare sets of objects up to 10 in different contexts, considering size and difference; - Explore patterns of numbers within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds. 	<p>Developing a strong grounding in number is essential for providing children with the platform to excel mathematically. Children should develop a deep conceptual understanding of the numbers to 10, the relationships between them and the patterns therein. By providing frequent and varied opportunities to build and apply this understanding, children will develop a secure base of knowledge from which mathematical mastery is built.</p>
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<p>Understanding the World</p>	<p><u>People and Communities</u> Children talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members. They know that other children don't always enjoy the same things, and are sensitive to this. They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.</p> <p><u>The World</u> Children know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things. They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another. They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur and talk about changes.</p> <p><u>Technology</u> Children recognise that a range of technology is used in places such as homes and schools. They select and use technology for particular purposes.</p>	<p><u>ELG Past and Present:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society; - Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class; - Recall some important narratives, characters and figures from the past encountered in books read in class. <p><u>ELG People, Culture and Communities</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps; - Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class; - Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and – when appropriate – maps. <p><u>ELG The Natural World</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p>	<p>The frequency and range of children's personal experiences increases their knowledge of the world around them – from visiting parks, libraries and museums to meeting important members of society such as police officers, nurses and firefighters. In addition, listening to a broad selection of stories, non fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially and ecologically diverse world. As well as building important knowledge, this extends their familiarity with words that support understanding across domains. And enriching and widening their vocabulary will support later reading comprehension.</p>
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<p>Expressive Arts and Design</p>	<p><u>Exploring and using media and materials</u> Children sing songs, make music and dance, and experiment with ways of changing them. They safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.</p> <p><u>Being imaginative</u> Children use what they have learnt about media and materials in original ways, thinking about uses and purposes. They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art, music, dance, role-play and stories.</p>	<p><u>ELG Creating with Materials:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draw and paint using a range of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function; - Share their creations, explaining the process they have used; - Make use of props and materials when role-playing characters in narratives and stories. <p><u>ELG Performing:</u> Children at the expected level of development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs; - Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and – when appropriate – move in time with music; - Co-construct, invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher. 	<p>The development of children’s artistic and cultural awareness supports their imagination and creativity. The quality and variety of what children see, hear and participate in is crucial for developing their understanding, self-expression, vocabulary and ability to communicate through the arts. The frequency, repetition and depth of their experiences are fundamental to their progress in interpreting and appreciating what they hear, respond to and observe.</p>

Appendix D. Logic Model



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