

Press release: Reception – a missed opportunity for too many children

Bold beginnings, a new report by Ofsted, shows that a third of all 5 year olds are being failed by their reception experience. The picture for disadvantaged children is even worse, with nearly half of them failing to meet expected levels of development at this unique and important stage. Today's report highlights missed opportunities and the painful consequences of falling behind.

This failure is not inevitable. The best schools show that it does not have to be the case. Headteachers in these schools ensure that all children, whatever their background, make great strides in their learning, particularly in reading, writing and using numbers.

Ofsted is recommending that headteachers put reading at the heart of the reception curriculum. Reception teachers should focus on developing children's spoken language and teaching them to read using systematic synthetic phonics. Schools should also make sure that children sit at tables when they learn to write.

HM Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said:

Reading should be at the heart of the Reception Year. It is important that in the Reception classroom young children hear new vocabulary and have the opportunity to practise new words and phrases.

The best schools know how to design their curriculum so that children's learning and development sets them up well for the rest of their schooling.

Reception should not just be a repeat of what children learned in their nursery or pre-school, or with their childminder. They deserve better than facing years of catching up.

In the best schools children:

- learn to read quickly and easily
- enjoy listening to stories as the highlight of the day
- learn poems and rhymes by heart
- learn about numbers through practical activities and formal, written recording
- develop their personal, social and emotional skills through play

In addition, headteachers commented that:

- the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is placing an

unnecessary burden on teachers

- newly qualified teachers are not well prepared to teach reading, writing or numbers in Reception

Ofsted is also recommending that the Department for Education:

- reviews the Early Years Foundation Stage to make sure that it provides sufficient clarity for the effective teaching of reading, writing and numbers
- streamlines the EYFSP in order to reduce teachers' workload
- raises the profile of early mathematics teaching, and makes a similar investment to that made in teaching phonics

Gill Jones, Ofsted Early Education Deputy Director, said:

Reception is essential. For many children, it is their first experience of full-time education, when teachers set the routines and expectations that will serve children well for the rest of their school life.

So schools need to get Reception right.

Reading lots of stories, poems and rhymes out loud to children, and encouraging them to join in and learn them by heart, will introduce them to new vocabulary, language structures and ideas. Providing children with the right reading books to practise what they have been taught in their phonics lessons will make sure they master the alphabetic code so they can read by themselves. This is the essential knowledge that children need to open up the rest of the curriculum.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector commissioned this thematic survey as part of a wider review of the curriculum in England.

During the summer term 2017, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited 41 successful primary schools in which children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds¹, achieved well.