



APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties Consultation on Early Years Foundation Stage Reforms

- The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Speech and Language Difficulties supports the intention of the reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to focus on strengthening language and vocabulary development to particularly support disadvantaged children.
- In its 2013 report, **The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage**, the APPG welcomed the fact that the government had made communication and language one of the three prime areas of learning in the EYFS. The APPG is reassured that this has been retained in the new proposed EYFS framework.
- The APPG also welcomes the recognition in the new proposed educational programme for Communication and Language that “the development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development.”
- The APPG does however have concerns about some of the proposed changes to the Early Learning Goals (ELGs).
- In particular the APPG is concerned that the emphasis on understanding within the Communication and Language area of learning has been reduced, and statements relating to spoken language comprehension have been placed in other areas of learning, namely ‘Personal, Social and Emotional Development’ and ‘Literacy’.
- The consequence of this change would be that the EYFSP would no longer provide a single, comprehensive measure of children’s communication and language development at age 5 at either the individual child, local area or national level. Therefore, spoken language comprehension should be integrated.
- The APPG therefore urges the Department for Education to look again at this area of learning, and consult with experts in communication and language development to ensure the new ELGs are clear, specific and provide a rounded picture of a child’s communication and language development.

The APPG also agrees with the submission from Professor Maggie Snowling of St John’s College Oxford that:

“The proposed educational programmes have a strong rationale - it is important to have noted that language underpins the majority of areas; this was in fact one of the findings which we reported to DFE in 2011 in relation to the EYFS [prior to the Tickell reforms]

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193505/DFE-RB172a.pdf The focus of the current remarks is primarily on the programmes for Communication and Language

and for Literacy. It is perhaps worth noting though, that there is no mention of appropriate non-verbal communication. Further, since many children with poor language develop behaviour problems, it might be useful to include some discussion of conduct in the section of PSED. The section on language might include encouraging children to think about the different senses of a word and to demonstrate their understanding in different ways (multi-contextual learning). The section on literacy could usefully include activities to encourage emergent reading skills, such as sound games and letter learning to foster phonological awareness.

As well as with the following points:

1. Listening, attention and understanding. Most of the specific goals are actually about responding rather than listening with understanding. Add: sit still and listen attentively to stories and teacher-talk; follow simple instructions; demonstrate understanding of new vocabulary in a variety of ways.
2. Speaking. De-emphasize 'recently introduced' vocabulary; given the curriculum is not meant to be top-down! Better to use 'age appropriate vocabulary' or 'a wide range of vocabulary including newly learned words'. I think it'd be better to keep separate 'Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences' from the grammatical aspects 'use full sentences, correct tenses etc.
4. PSED. I would dispute the claim that the evidence that executive function (EF) is a strong predictor of literacy skills. Rather the evidence suggests EF correlates with language and it is language that predicts reading. EF has a more central role to play as a foundation for numeracy. EF is a complex construct tapping a variety of skills and in any case do teachers know what EF is? Why not say 'encourage self-regulation to ensure the optimal context for learning'.
5. Self-regulation. I'd make the point above as a goal: e.g., knows how to regulate behaviour in order to engage with learning or possibly 'joins in with others but can resist distractions when appropriate'.
6. (Reading) Comprehension. rather than again mentioning recently introduced vocabulary, it is more task appropriate to say 'can infer the meaning of new words from context of the story'.

And lastly:

“Children with developmental language disorder (DLD) or broader SLCN will necessarily perform poorly in the EYFS. It is vitally important that the framework be used not only as a means of supporting the development of these children but also as a baseline for assessing response to intervention and subsequent referral to speech and language services if and when appropriate. Similarly, evidence-based programmes should be implemented to improve language and literacy development in children at-risk of failure.”

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Submitted on behalf of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties by the APPG's Co-Chairs Geraint Davies MP (geraint.davies.mp@parliament.uk) and Lord Ramsbotham (ramsbothamd@parliament.uk).