

## Summary of key points from a meeting between Early Education, TACTYC and Gill Jones and Lee Owston of Ofsted, 13 December 2017

- ***Bold Beginnings* should be seen as part of a suite of complementary reports** including

- *Are You Ready: Good practice in school readiness*<sup>1</sup>,
- *Teaching and play in the early years: a balancing act*<sup>2</sup> and
- *Unknown children: destined for disadvantage?*<sup>3</sup>.

Points covered in previous reports - for example in relation to the Prime Areas, SEND and under 4s – were not repeated in *Bold Beginnings* for reasons of space and because they had already been made elsewhere. ***Bold Beginnings* should be seen as an extension which does not replace or contradict the messages from previous reports.**

- The report recommendations focus on what is not done well enough, and do not comment on what is already done well. If an area was not mentioned, that meant it was not a concern, not that it was unimportant. **Schools therefore should not stop doing what they already do well.**
- The report could be considered a **think piece** to encourage head teachers to engage with Reception teachers, review their practice and challenge their thinking. It remains the case that:
  - Ofsted do not have a preferred style of teaching.
  - Schools must do what's best for children, not what they think Ofsted want.
  - The current inspection framework remains in place until 2019, so schools should not be unthinkingly changing what they do to accommodate what they think the report may be saying.

Early Education and TACTYC were in agreement with some of Ofsted's key messages in *Bold Beginnings*, such as that:

- Ofsted inspection reports show that **children are coming out of nursery and preschool with good outcomes and skills** – although these are not always recognised by schools when children arrive in Reception, and it is important to build on this progress especially for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Ofsted inspection reports comment on play and continuous provision in Reception, and enabling environments. Where there is provision judged as less than good, there is often a **lack of challenge in Reception** compared to nursery.
- Ofsted are concerned that **children in the early years are often too sedentary**. There is insufficient emphasis on physical development –

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/are-you-ready-good-practice-in-school-readiness>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-and-play-in-the-early-years-a-balancing-act>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/helping-disadvantaged-young-children-ofsted-thematic-report>

practitioners should not just seek to replicate the inside provision in outside areas.

- Ofsted believes that **more needs to be done to improve spoken language**. This is why the report recommends a focus on reading, in all aspects of the word. Children who hear rhymes, poems and stories frequently and join in with them develop a far better vocabulary to support their communication and wider learning.
- Ofsted were keen to emphasise that the **references to direct teaching in the report have been misinterpreted to mean formal, sitting-down learning**, rather than short episodes of adult-led teaching. Schools should continue to refer to *Teaching and play in the early years: a balancing act* for a fuller discussion of teaching approaches in the early years.

There remain some areas where Early Education and TACTYC's views diverge from those of Ofsted, or we may agree about the issue but see the solutions differently:

- The report states that some schools were mistakenly taking the ELGs as a curriculum, perhaps explaining why they found some teachers and leaders felt that the **EYFS and ELGs** were limiting. While Ofsted have recommended that these should therefore be reviewed, Early Education and TACTYC believe that teachers and leaders who have such misconceptions need better information and training about the EYFS and differentiating teaching appropriately for all children.
- The report identified a number of heads and teachers commenting about the **workload associated with the EYFS Profile**, because of contradictory guidance. In particular, Ofsted were critical of where moderators were pressuring teachers to collect large amounts of data, leading to recommendations for this be reviewed. Early Education and TACTYC believe that the Profile is not the cause of the workload issues, but rather that the pressure for unnecessary amounts of data collection should be tackled, through improving training for moderators and challenging the use of online data collection tools which also drive this.
- Early Education and TACTYC disagree with the Ofsted recommendation to the DFE about raising the profile of **early mathematics teaching** by supporting the development of appropriate schemes and resources for teaching maths in Reception. Rather, Early Education and TACTYC believe that teachers need more CPD to develop their confidence to support and extend children's mathematical learning through their play.
- Early Education and TACTYC disagree with the Ofsted recommendation that the teaching of reading, including systematic synthetic phonics, is the **core purpose of the Reception Year**. We argue that the core purpose remains that which applies throughout the EYFS, which is building sound foundations in the prime areas and Characteristics of Effective Learning. We agree, however, with the report's emphasis on stories, rhymes and poems read aloud as an important element in developing language and the early stages of reading, and also that the teaching of early maths in Reception could be

further developed and enhanced through better continuing professional development.

- The Bold Beginnings report recommends a **review of the EYFS** in the light of the new National Curriculum. Early Education and TACTYC believe it should be the other way around - that alignment between YR and Y1 must be bottom up, and not lead to inappropriate curricula or teaching methods being pushed down into the early years. Transition is important, and some YR children will be ready to cover Y1 material, while some Y1 children, especially those who have not yet achieved the ELGs, will still need access to the EYFS.
- In relation to the consistently lower results in **the literacy and mathematics ELGs**, Early Education and TACTYC believe the problem lies in the ELGs having been set at an unrealistic level which does not reflect the realities of children's development. Ofsted on the other hand is recommending reviewing the ELGs in the light of the Y1 curriculum.

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