



Department
for Education

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2021 Reforms

Research report

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Glossary

Childminder: This is a person who looks after children for at least 2 hours per day, for payment. Childminders must operate from domestic premises for at least 50% of their time. They may or may not employ childminder assistants.

Early Learning Goals (ELGs): These goals set out the expected level of development for children by the end of the EYFS (end of reception year).

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): The framework that sets the regulatory standards and requirements for learning, development, and care that all early years providers in England must follow to ensure every child has the best start in life. This covers all children aged 0-5 years, including reception in school.

Early Years Foundation Stage profile (EYFSP): The EYFSP is a statutory assessment that must be completed for each child in the final term of the year in which they reach age five, usually in reception year. Each child's level of development must be assessed against the ELGs, and practitioners must indicate whether children are meeting the expected levels of development, or if they are not yet reaching expected levels and should be assessed as 'emerging'.

Group-based settings: This covers public, private, voluntary, or independent nurseries (operating in non-domestic premises).

Multi Academy Trust (MAT): This is a trust which operates more than one academy school. Academy schools are directly funded by the Department for Education.

Providers: These are organisations that provide some form of EYFS care or service.

Reception year: Reception is the first year of primary school and marks the end of EYFS. Reception year is the year before primary education begins with Key Stage 1.

School-based settings: This refers to nurseries that are set within schools.

Executive Summary

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) sets the standards and requirements that all early years (EY) providers in England must follow, to ensure every child has the best start in life. The first five years of a child's life provide a critical opportunity to close the outcomes gap that is already emerging at a young age between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers. The EYFS aims to ensure that all children have the skills and knowledge needed to thrive and to make a successful transition to later schooling.

After piloting, public consultation, and early adoption by 3,004 settings, the Department for Education (DfE) rolled out reforms to the EYFS from September 2021 onwards. The aims of the 2021 EYFS reforms were improving EY outcomes for all children, particularly disadvantaged children, by focusing on the critical areas that build the foundations for later success, such as mathematics, language development and literacy. The reforms also aimed to reduce unnecessary assessment paperwork for practitioners and teachers so they can spend more valuable classroom time supporting children through rich curriculum activities. DfE made significant changes to the EYFS learning and development and profile assessment requirements, and placed explicit emphasis on promotion of good oral health. Alongside statutory changes within the EYFS framework, the reforms also encouraged changes to practice within settings to strengthen curriculum planning, teaching, and assessment which has been at the core of the reforms.

IFF Research, on behalf of DfE, conducted surveys and qualitative research among EY providers, staff, and local authorities to assess how the 2021 reforms have been embedded into EY practice across the sector so far, and to identify any ongoing gaps or support needs.

Research Design and Methodology

The quantitative strand of the research consisted of surveys with three key groups: EY leaders, staff, and all local authorities (LAs) in England. Fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2022. The fieldwork with leaders consisted of four provider types: schools with nurseries (termed school-based providers), schools with reception only, public, private, voluntary or independent nurseries (termed group-based providers), and childminders. The fieldwork with staff covered the same provider types, excluding childminders.

In total, 3,496 leaders took part in the providers' survey, consisting of 634 group-based providers, 827 childminders, 923 reception leaders, and 1,112 school-based providers. This reflected response rates of between 9% and 13%. The leaders'

survey was weighted to be representative within type of setting, and hence for each type we can be confident that the findings are both robust and representative. It proved challenging to obtain responses to the staff survey, which obtained 467 responses (a response rate of 22% where there was a known sample). The LA survey had 101 responses (a response rate of 66%).

The qualitative strand of the research was conducted as a follow-up to the survey, between February and March 2023. IFF Research conducted 60 interviews with leaders and staff at school-based providers, schools with reception only, group-based providers and with childminders. The qualitative sample was structured to ensure coverage across the range of EY provider types, and representation across a range of survey responses at key questions.

What changes have EY settings made following the 2021 reforms?

The most common actions that EY settings had made as a result of the reforms (at the time of the survey) was to review their curriculum/learning and development approach, with 87% of childminders, 94% of leaders in group-based settings, and 98% of leaders in receptions and school-based settings reporting this. This was followed by actually making changes to their curriculum/learning and development approach (cited by 66% of childminders, 87% of leaders in group-based settings, and 94% in receptions and school-based settings). The vast majority of providers had also changed assessment practices, ranging from 71% of childminders, to 84% of group-based settings, 88% of receptions and 90% of school-based settings. Fewer had changed teaching practices, ranging from 39% of childminders, to 57% of group-based, 61% of school-based and 66% of reception classes.

Changes to curriculum/learning and development approach

The most common changes mentioned by settings who had made changes to their curriculum/learning and development approach were aligned with the objectives of the EYFS reforms. Following the reforms, over four in five of these settings had put less focus on observation/tracking and more focus on spending time with the children (reported by 89% of leaders in school-based settings, 88% of leaders in reception settings, 84% in group-based settings, and 82% of childminders). This was followed by a greater focus on communication and language (reported by 81% of leaders in school-based settings, 76% in receptions, 67% in group-based settings, and 55% of childminders).

Among those settings which had changed their curriculum or teaching practices, the vast majority reported that teaching had improved as a result, ranging from 80% of

reception settings, 79% of school-based, 74% of group-based and 69% of childminders.

Changes to assessment

Again, in line with the objectives of the reforms, the majority of those who had made changes reported that time on assessment paperwork had reduced, ranging from 73% of leaders in group-based settings to 67% of leaders in reception. As a result of less time being spent on assessment, the majority of settings reported they could spend more time with children (ranging from 87% of group-based providers to 74% of childminders) and between 45% and 50% of settings reported they were doing less regular tracking of ELGs.

Similarly, between 56% and 67% of all settings reported that time spent on other paperwork (not related to assessment) had reduced following the reforms. The main reported benefits of this were spending more time with children, and better-quality interactions with children, both mentioned by over four in five settings of all types. Staff views were in line with those of leaders, in terms of reduced time spent on assessment-related and other paperwork, and the impacts of this.

Oral health teaching

A little over a half of all group-based and school-based leaders reported making changes to their oral health teaching (58% and 56%). Slightly below half of reception leaders and childminders reported making such changes (48% and 47%). The main reason for not making changes was that settings reported they were already doing enough activities related to oral health.

When asked about what new activities leaders had implemented in their settings, the primary change across all settings was talking more to children about their oral health. This was closely followed by reading stories about oral health-related topics like dentist visits and healthy eating.

Local authority moderation

There were mixed views on the removal of LA statutory moderation from the EYFS profile. Leaders in school-based and reception settings were generally either ambivalent or positive, while LAs had a more negative view of this change. The most common impact reported across both settings was a reduction in stress and pressure on staff (18% of school-based leaders and 16% of reception leaders). Excluding those who did not know, over one in five reported that this removal had no impact (21% of reception settings, and 24% of school-based settings). Among both

school-based settings and reception settings, 17% reported that they did not know what impact the removal had had.

Conversely, half of LAs(50%) thought that this had a negative impact on the consistency of EYFS data, with a further 32% reporting that it was too early to tell (at the time of this research, the EYFS profile assessment had only taken place nationally once under the reformed approach). Two-fifths (40%) thought there had been no change in their relationships with EY leaders and teachers following the removal of statutory LA moderation, but 26% reported there has been a reduction in contact with them and 17% reported that there had been a loss of support networks for staff in EY settings.

How easy or difficult did settings find it to implement the reforms?

Leaders were asked how easy or difficult they found implementing the new requirements within the EYFS. There were some differences in views, with those in reception and school-based settings more likely than leaders from group-based settings and childminders to report that implementing the new requirements was easy (56% and 54% of reception and school-based settings, compared with 44% and 41% of group-based settings and childminders). A substantial proportion of leaders from all settings reported that it was neither easy nor difficult (39% of reception settings, 40% of school-based settings, 43% of group-based settings and 53% of childminders), whilst only a minority reported that it was difficult (5% of reception settings, 5% of school-based settings, 12% of group-based settings and 4% of childminders).

Positively, most leaders across reception (71%), school-based settings (70%), group-based settings (64%) and childminders (75%) reported that they did not face any barriers to implementation. Childminders were the least likely to report that they faced barriers (7%, compared to reception settings, 25%, school-based settings, 28%, and group-based settings, 30%). Among the minority that experienced barriers, lack of time was the biggest issue raised. This was followed by lack of guidance, late guidance, and lack of support.

Support for implementing the reforms

Leaders who lead, manage, or supervise other staff were asked how they supported their staff to respond to the EYFS 2021 reforms. The most common response was via training and CPD (42% of school-based leaders, 37% of group-based leaders, 32% of reception leaders and 18% of childminders). Leaders in group-based settings were more likely than leaders in other settings to say they were supporting staff via

multiple methods, including staff meetings, guidance documents and in class support and supervision.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of staff reported receiving support from their school or nursery to implement the EYFS reforms. The vast majority (96%) of them reported that this support was helpful, including 44% who thought it was very helpful.

Around two-thirds of school-based leaders (66%) and reception leaders (63%) received some support from their LA to implement the reforms, as did 55% of group-based providers and 49% of childminders. When asked what support they had received from LAs, leaders most commonly reported training (81% of reception leaders, 76% of school-based leaders, 73% of group-based leaders and 66% of childminders) followed by written guidance and webinars. While all LAs reported that they provided some support to EY settings, the most common barrier LAs reported facing was a lack of funding (61%), followed by a lack of LA staff resource due to recruitment and retention challenges (50%).

Despite this, most leaders (around nine in ten across all setting types) found the support they had received from their LA useful. Settings who did not find it useful reported they would have preferred more practical guidance on how to implement the reforms, and guidance that was more tailored to their type of setting (in particular among group-based providers and childminders).

Views on the effects of the reforms

The majority of leaders and staff thought the reforms have had or will have a positive effect on children's learning and development. Leaders in school-based settings were the most positive (75%), compared to leaders from reception (68%), group-based settings (65%) and childminders (61%).

Leaders who felt the reforms were having, or would have, a positive effect were asked what impacts they had seen or expected to see. The most common response was that the reforms were leading to children having better quality interactions with staff (58% of group-based leaders, 53% of childminders, 48% of reception year leaders and 47% of school-based leaders), followed by the reforms were leading to children having improved communication and language. This was more likely to be mentioned by school-based leaders (48%) and reception year leaders (44%), compared to group-based leaders (32%) and childminders (19%).

Just over one-third of leaders in school-based settings and reception thought the reforms would have a positive effect on children's transitions to Year 1, with a similar proportion who thought it was too early to tell.

In terms of the main improvements for children, findings included children having better quality interactions with staff, improved communication and language, and improved personal, social and emotional development. The view was that these outcomes were due to reduced time being spent on assessments, more time spent interacting with children, and a more child-focused curriculum.

An area of concern raised was whether the reforms catered sufficiently for children with SEND, or other additional needs such as English as an additional language. Some providers (across all setting types) highlighted this as in need of more attention within guidance.

Conclusions

Overall, the research findings indicate that the EYFS reforms have been well-received across most of the sector, are bedding in well and addressing their intended objectives.

Most settings found implementing the reforms easy, or at least unproblematic. Where settings encountered challenges, this related mainly to a lack of time or lack of guidance.

The majority of settings have reviewed and/or made changes to their curriculum and learning and development approach. Many settings report that they have now made this more child-focused and are appreciative of this flexibility.

Most also made changes to their assessment practices, with the majority reporting a decrease in the time they spent on assessments. Importantly, leaders and staff considered that this has had positive effects on children, as they now have better quality interactions with staff.

In terms of future considerations for the department, while the majority of respondents did not report issues with the reformed EYFS, some leaders and staff thought the reforms should place more emphasis on children with SEND. Some also noted that the transition into Key Stage 1 can still be difficult for some children, who need more support after the EYFS. These areas could therefore be the focus of future policy development. More detail on these conclusions can be found in the report.

1. Introduction and Methodology

Background and context

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) sets the standards and requirements that all early years (EY) providers in England must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The EYFS aims to ensure that all children have the skills and knowledge needed to make a successful transition to later schooling, and to close the outcomes gap that is already emerging at a young age between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers.

The Department for Education (DfE) worked with sector experts between 2017 and 2021 to develop the 2021 EYFS education reforms. The reforms were piloted in the 2018/2019 academic year, followed by a public consultation, and a voluntary 'early adopter year' during the 2020/2021 academic year, in which 3,004 primary schools participated. The wider EY sector has been implementing the reformed [2021 version of EYFS statutory framework](#) since September 2021. The aims of the 2021 reforms were twofold: to improve EY outcomes for all children, particularly disadvantaged children, by focusing on the critical areas that build the foundations for later success, such as mathematics, language development and literacy. Secondly, to reduce unnecessary assessment paperwork for practitioners and teachers so they can spend more valuable classroom time supporting children through rich curriculum activities.

The reforms to EYFS include:

- Stronger educational programmes that put early language development at the centre of teaching and cement the focus on planning rich curriculum activities, rather than on tracking and data.
- Revisions to early learning goals to make them clearer and more specific, to make it easier for teachers to make accurate and consistent judgements when completing the EYFS profile.
- Changes to EYFS profile (EYFSP) assessment requirements through the removal of statutory local authority (LA) moderation and the 'exceeding' judgement band, changes to statutory reporting guidance, reducing the level of paperwork required around assessment and simplifying the assessment process.
- Changes to safeguarding and welfare, in particular, promoting good oral health to children.

Alongside the 2021 reforms, DfE also published non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS, including specific content for reception age children for the first time within [Development Matters](#)¹. This was published to help early years providers implement the reformed framework. DfE also provided updated guidance for settings on the 2 year progress check, celebrating SEND, and guidance for parents on the EYFS.

IFF Research, on behalf of the DfE, conducted surveys and qualitative research among EY providers, staff, and LAs to assess how the 2021 reforms have been embedded into EY practice across the sector so far, and identify any ongoing gaps or support needs.

The key areas for the research to explore were:

Impacts on curriculum and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisions made to the curriculum. • Ease of implementation/barriers. • Impact on practices/procedures. • Impact on assessment process. • Impact on transition to Key Stage 1. • Gaps/difficulties/unresolved issues.
Perceived impacts on children's outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived impacts on children's outcomes so far. • Perceived impacts on different groups of children. • Contextual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Local authority support and changes in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of support provided to implement the reforms. • Evaluation of support provided. • Gaps/difficulties with the support provided. • Impact of reforms on local authorities practices.
Impacts on workload and support available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of reforms on time spent on different tasks. • Opportunities created by any freed-up time. • Type and evaluation of support provided to staff by leaders. • Use of other government support for COVID-19 recovery.

The findings of this report cover: the changes that providers have made as a result of the 2021 EYFS reforms, barriers and challenges faced when implementing the reforms (including how these have been addressed), the perceived effects the

¹ Development Matters is non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EY foundation stage to provide a top-level view of how children develop and learn for all EY practitioners.

reforms have had on both staff and children, any reported gaps in the reforms and suggested considerations for the future of the EYFS framework.

Research Design and Methodology

Quantitative methodology

The quantitative strand of the research consisted of surveys with three groups: EY leaders, staff, and all local authorities in England. Fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2022.

IFF designed the three survey questionnaires with input from EY research and policy teams within DfE. Each questionnaire was cognitively tested prior to mainstage fieldwork, and a pilot was also conducted for the leader and staff surveys. The purpose of these testing stages was to refine the survey structure and question wording to ensure the questions were clear, relevant and understood consistently across the different groups of participants.

The fieldwork with leaders consisted of four provider types: schools with nurseries, schools with reception only, public, private, voluntary or independent nurseries, and childminders. In this report, schools with nurseries are referred to as school-based providers, and public, private, voluntary or independent nurseries are referred to as group-based providers. The fieldwork with staff covered the same provider types, excluding childminders.

School-based establishments (schools with nurseries and schools with reception only) were identified from Get Information About Schools (GIAS), DfE's register of educational establishments in England and Wales. Due to the required number of responses and the projected response rate, all eligible establishments were selected from GIAS. Nurseries and childminders were sampled from Ofsted's list of all organisations providing 'childcare on non-domestic premises'. The sampling for these two latter groups was done randomly, stratifying for region and deprivation band, and without accounting for email addresses availability. The list of sampled providers was shared with DfE, who then provided contact details where these were available. DfE did not know who took part in the research. Further detail on sampling is included in the Technical Annex.

Leaders and childminders in all four provider groups were sent an email or a letter (depending on the information available for the contact) inviting them to take part in the survey. To maximise completion, up to 10 follow up reminder emails and a physical letter were sent as well.

Staff were contacted through a snowball methodology, where leaders at the end of the survey were asked to provide contact details of up to 3 members of staff in their establishment. Those named individuals were then sent an email to invite them to take part in the survey, as well as up to 10 reminders. Towards the end of fieldwork, an open link to the staff survey was created to facilitate participation and was shared with all leaders who had already completed the survey.

LAs were sent 1 invite email directly from DfE, plus three email reminders.

Fieldwork with leaders was completed either online or over the phone, whilst fieldwork with staff and LAs was completed online.

Table 1.1 Response rates to surveys

Type		No. invited	No. of complete responses	Response rate (%)
Leaders	School-based	8,846	1,112	13%
	Reception	7,457	923	12%
	Group-based	7,300	634	9%
	Childminders	8,490	827	10%
	Total	32,093	3,496	11%
Staff	Via leader contacts	1,438	318	22%
	Via online open link	N/A	158	N/A
LAs		148	101	68%

The response rates for leaders and LAs were in line with expectations for a survey of this type with these audiences. The volume of staff responses was lower than expected, mainly because some leaders were reluctant to share staff contact details using the planned snowball methodology (which limited the number of contacts that could be generated). Where staff contact details were provided, and staff could be emailed a survey link, the response rate was in line with expectation. The quantitative data for leaders has been weighted to be representative within provider type and is therefore reported by provider type, rather than at aggregate level. The staff and LA data are unweighted. Further details are included in the Technical Annex.

Qualitative methodology

The qualitative strand of the research consisted of 60 interviews with leaders and staff at schools with nurseries (school-based providers), schools with reception only, public, private, voluntary or independent nurseries (group-based providers) and with childminders. This fieldwork was carried out between 21st February and 27th March 2023.

Interviews were completed on Teams, Zoom or over the phone and each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Participants were asked at the end of the survey if they were willing to be recontacted about taking part in the qualitative interviews. From those who agreed, IFF selected a sample to ensure coverage across the range of EY provider types, and to ensure representation across a range of survey responses at key questions. This included: length of time in role (leaders only), length of time in sector, region, changes made following of the reforms, how time spent completing assessment paperwork has changed, changes made to oral health activities, barriers to implementation, and what effects they thought the reforms have had on children so far. Further detail on this is included in the Technical Annex.

Table 1.2 Qualitative interviewees

Type of Provider	Leader interviews	Staff interviews	Total interviews
Reception	10	5	15
School-based	10	5	15
Group-based	10	5	15
Childminders	15	N/A	15
Total	45	15	60

For the analysis and reporting stage, IFF developed an analysis framework linked to the research questions which enabled the exploration of themes by variables such as setting type, role and length of experience.

While the findings from qualitative research provide robust and detailed insight, it should be noted that the qualitative research was designed to provide representation

across the sample and was not designed to be representative. It is therefore not generalisable to the wider population.

Interpreting this report

This report contains the findings from both quantitative data (the surveys with leaders, staff and LAs) and qualitative data (the telephone interviews with leaders and staff). The findings from both strands are discussed together under heading themes. Generally, under each heading or sub-heading, the quantitative data is discussed first, followed by evidence from the qualitative data. In instances where the qualitative interviews did not explore a certain theme, only the quantitative findings are described, and vice versa.

Where the equivalent questions were asked of each audience, findings from the leaders' survey are always referred to first, followed by the staff survey, then the LA survey. Data from leaders is referred to first given that they were the key focus of this research and the methodological design, and therefore had the larger number of responses.

Data for leaders is split into four types for each of the four settings: reception, school-based, group-based and childminders. The data is not referred to at an 'overall' level for leaders as each of the four settings were weighted individually. More detail on this can be found in the Technical Annex.

Differences between sub-groups and setting type are only commented on in the text if they are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, percentages may not total to exactly 100% or precisely reflect 'net scores' provided in the data tables.

Where 30 or less respondents gave an answer to any given question in 1 of the 3 surveys, this data is reported in numbers rather than percentages.

The report uses the exact wording used in the questionnaires to accurately reflect the results. The questionnaires can be made available on request. Please contact eyfs.consultation@education.gov.uk.

2. What have EY settings changed following the reforms?

This section looks at the actions EY settings and LAs took following of the reforms, focusing on their knowledge of the reforms, any changes they made to the curriculum, learning and development approaches, changes to assessment practices, and changes to oral health teaching.

Summary of findings:

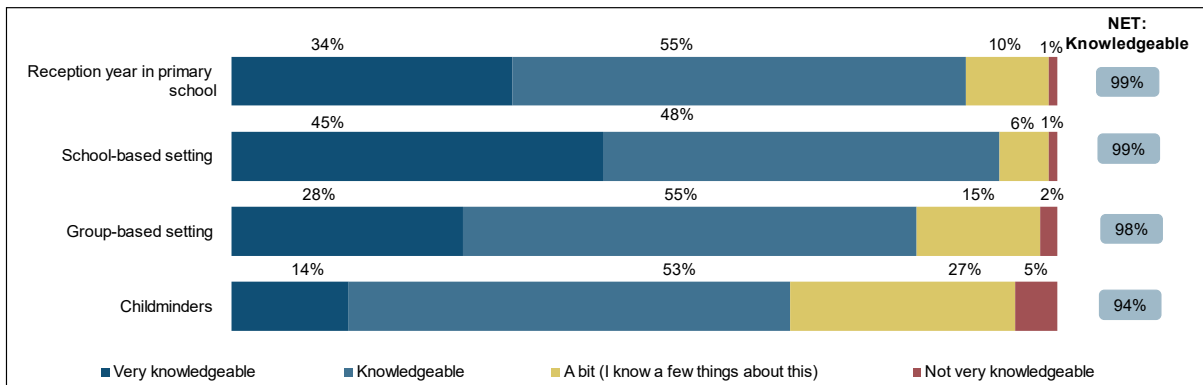
- The research found that the majority of leaders, staff and LA respondents were knowledgeable about the reforms.
- The most common change that EY settings made post the 2021 EYFS reforms was to review and make changes to their curriculum/learning and development approaches. This was reported by both leaders and staff.
- The main change to the curriculum and learning and development approaches was to put less focus on recording observations, instead spending more time with children.
- Leaders and staff across all setting types most commonly felt that their assessment practices had changed by spending more time with children.
- Half of LA respondents felt that the removal of LA statutory moderation had a negative impact on the quality of EY education.
- Around three-fifths of leaders reported making changes to their oral health teaching, with around half of staff reporting changes made. The most common change reported, across all settings, was talking to children about oral health more.

Self-reported knowledge of EYFS 2021 reforms

The survey asked a screening question to identify leaders and staff who had at least heard of the EYFS 2021 reforms, to ensure the rest of the survey questions were relevant. Among these, the vast majority of leaders said they knew at least 'a bit' about the reforms, ranging from 99% of those in reception and school-based settings to 94%² of childminders. School-based settings were more likely than all other settings to report that they were 'very knowledgeable' about the reforms (45%).

² Due to rounding these figures do not exactly equal 100%

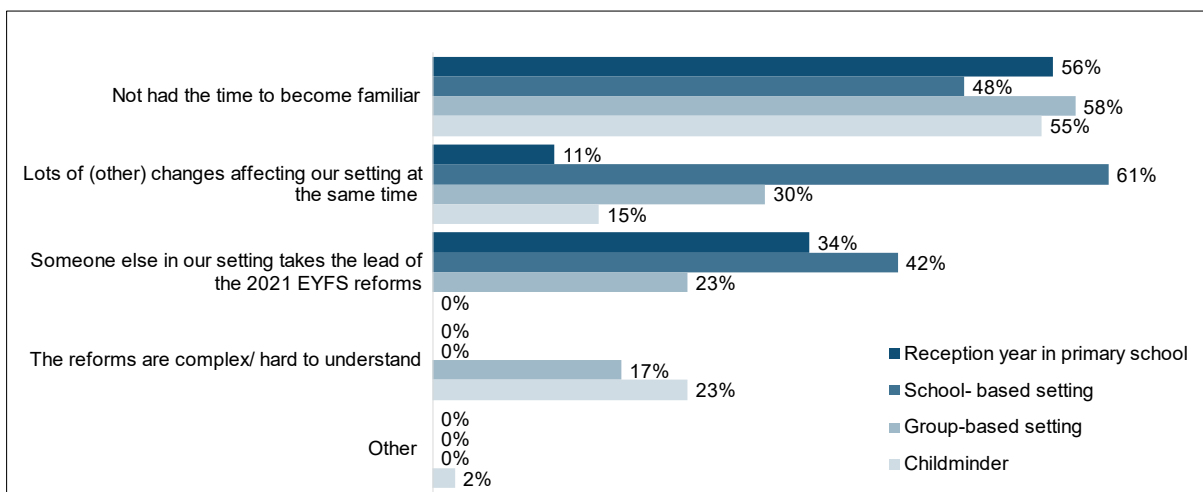
Figure 2.1 How knowledgeable leaders are about the reforms



Base: A1A. All leaders who had heard of the 2021 EYFS reforms. Reception (n=923); School-based (n=1112); Group-based (n=634); Childminder (n=827). In cases where figures do not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding. Due to the small number of responses 'don't know' is excluded from the chart (Reception (<1%); School-based (0%); Group-based (0%); Childminder (1%)).

Among the small proportion of leaders who reported they were not very knowledgeable about the reforms or responded with 'don't know', those from group-based settings (58%), reception (56%) and childminders (55%) most commonly reported that it was due to not having the time to become familiar with the reforms (Figure 2.2). School-based settings leaders were more likely to feel that it was because they had lots of other changes affecting their setting at the same time (61%).

Figure 2.2 Reasons why leaders were not knowledgeable about the reforms



Base: A1b. All respondents who were not knowledgeable or did not know about the 2021 EYFS reforms. Reception (n=78); School-based (n=66); Group-based (n=530); Childminders (n=1824).

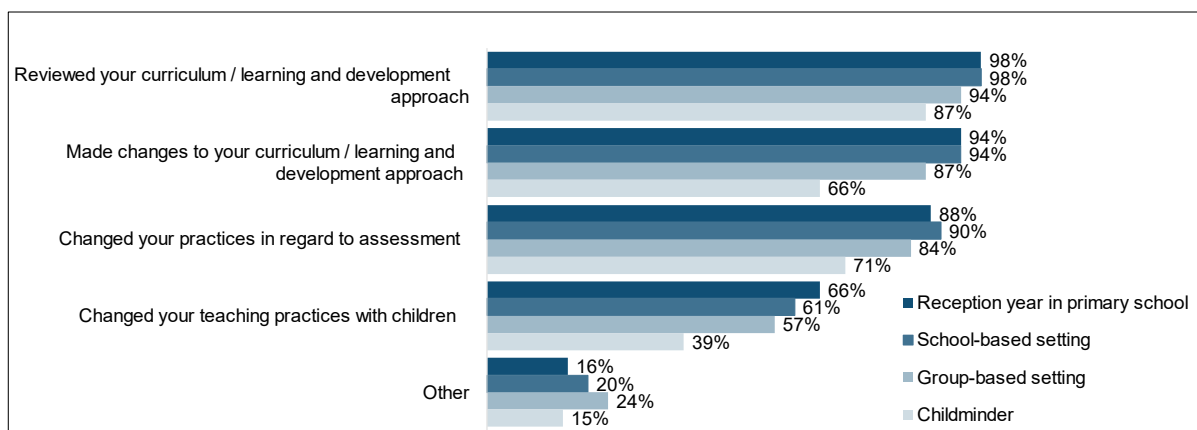
Staff were also very knowledgeable about the reforms, with nearly all (97%) reporting that they knew at least 'a bit' about the reforms. This ranged from 100% of staff surveyed in school-based settings, 98% of staff in reception classes, and 94% of staff in group-based settings.

All LA respondents (100%) reported that they were knowledgeable, with the majority reporting they were very knowledgeable about the reforms (85%) with the remainder feeling fairly knowledgeable (15%).

Changes made following the reforms

The most common change that EY settings had made following the reforms (at the time of the survey) was to both review and make changes to their curriculum/learning and development approaches, although these changes were closely followed by making changes to assessment practices. Figure 2.3 details the top five changes made across settings.

Figure 2.3 Changes leaders made following the reforms



Base: A7. All leaders that responded positively to at least one code. Reception (n=914); School-based (n=1,105); Group-based (n=616); Childminder (n=707)

Reception and school-based leaders reported making the most changes following the reforms, whilst childminders reported the least. When asked whether leaders had made actual changes to their curriculum/learning and development approach, around nine in ten leaders at reception, school-based and group-based settings reported making this change (94% for reception and school-based, and 87% for group-based), as had two-thirds of childminders (66%).

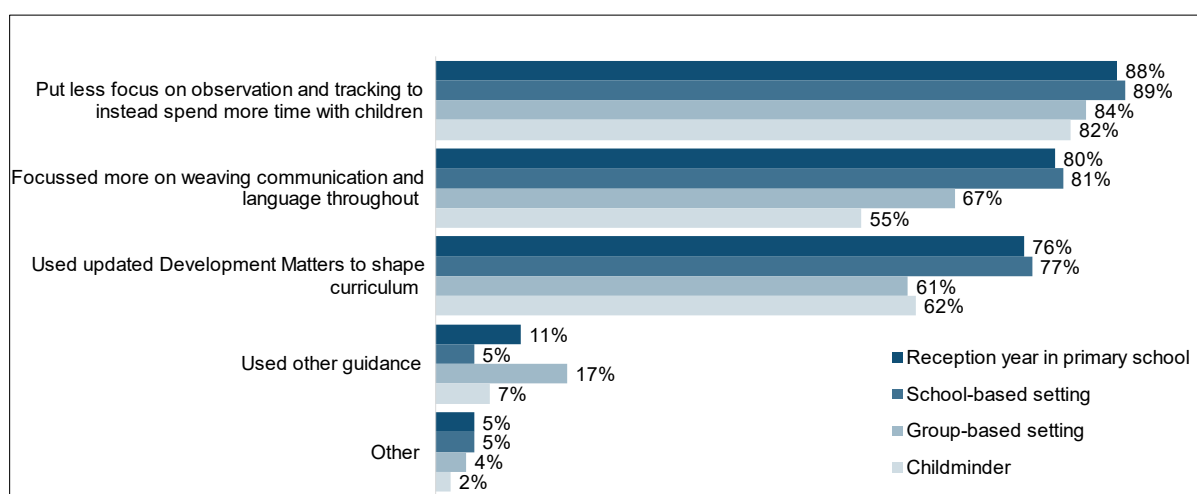
Findings from staff aligned with the leaders' survey, with 98% of school-based, 97% of reception, and 96% of group-based staff reporting that their setting had reviewed curriculum/learning and development approaches following the 2021 EYFS reforms. Furthermore, 92% of school-based, 92% of reception, and 87% of group-based staff reported that their setting had made changes to the curriculum/learning and development approaches following the 2021 EYFS reforms.

Leaders and staff who took part in the qualitative interviews were broadly positive about the changes they had made. Many of the participants praised the flexibility that the reforms had given them.

Changes made to the curriculum/learning and development approaches, and teaching practices

Across all settings, the most common way that leaders changed the curriculum to reflect the EYFS requirements was by putting less focus on observation and tracking and instead spending more time with children, detailed in Figure 2.4. This was one of the key objectives of the EYFS reforms.

Figure 2.4 How did leaders change their curriculum/learning and development approach to reflect the latest requirements?



Base: A8: All leaders who had changed the curriculum. Reception (855), School-based (1,034), Group-based (519), childminders (464)

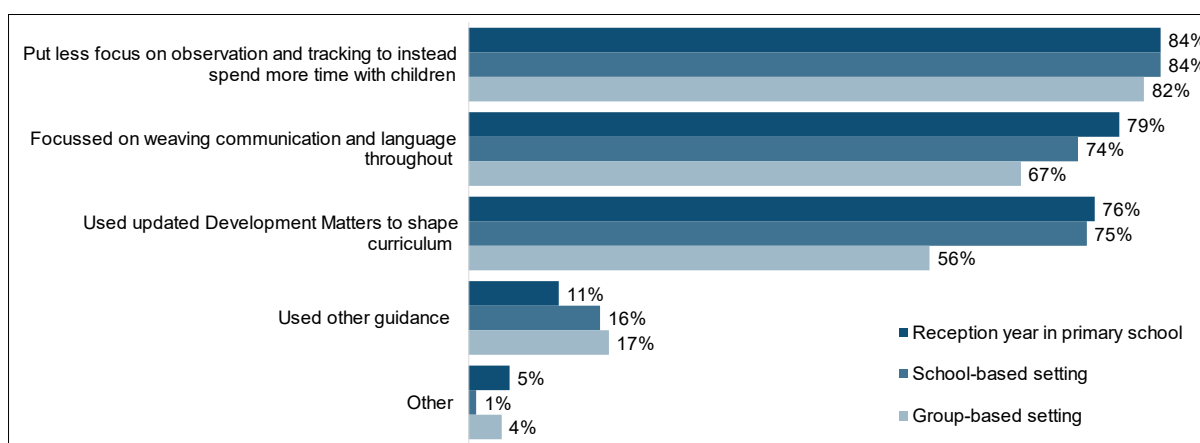
Leaders from reception and school-based settings were more likely than leaders from group-based settings or childminders to have changed their curriculum/learning and development approach through focussing more on weaving communication and language throughout (80% of reception and 81% of school-based leaders, compared to 67% of group-based leaders and 55% of childminders). Similarly, reception and school-based leaders (76% of reception and 77% of school-based leaders), were more likely than group-based leaders and childminders (61% of group-based leaders and 62% of childminders) to report that they had amended their curriculum/learning and development approach by using updated Development Matters guidance.

In addition to changes made to the curriculum, leaders were also asked about the changes their setting has made to their teaching practices. Similarly, the most common change to teaching practices reported by leaders across all settings was putting less focus on observation and tracking to instead spend more time with

children (91% of school-based settings, 90% of reception, 86% of group-based settings and 82% of childminders).

Staff were also asked what changes they have made to their curriculum/learning and development approach to reflect the latest requirements. Similarly, to leaders, the primary change that staff mentioned was less focus on observation with more focus on communication and language and using the updated Development Matters document, as shown in Figure 2.5. Staff at group-based settings were less likely to have reported a focus on weaving in communication (67%) and using Development Matters (56%) compared with staff in the other settings.

Figure 2.5 How did staff change their curriculum/learning and development approach to reflect the latest requirements?



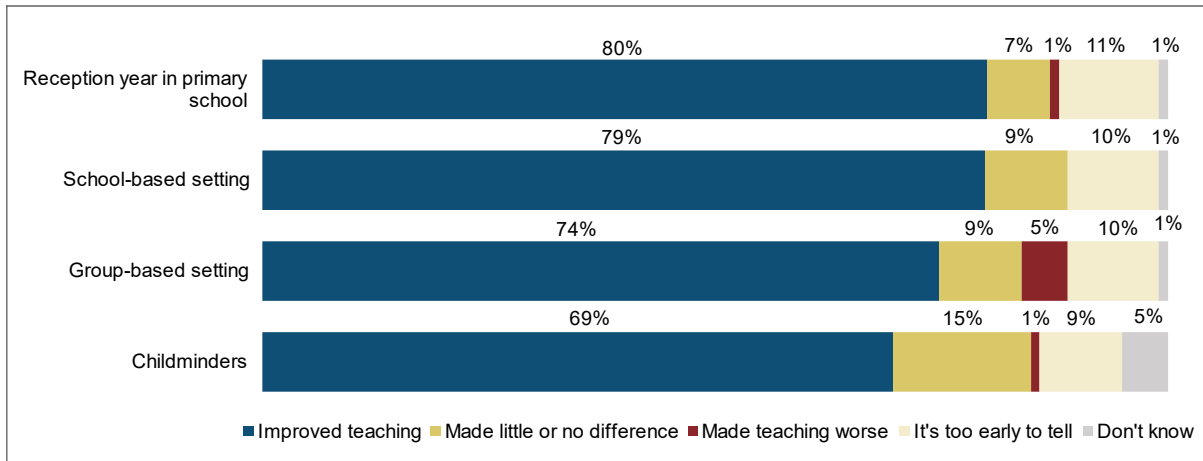
Base: A8: All staff respondents who changed curriculum / learning and development approach. Reception (183), School-based (103), Group-based (136)

In addition to changes made to the curriculum, staff were also asked about the changes their setting has made to their teaching practices. Similarly to leaders, staff reported that the most common change to teaching practice was less focus on observation and tracking (85%).

Perceived impact of reforms on the quality of teaching

When asked about the impact the EYFS reforms had on the quality of teaching, leaders generally felt that the changes had improved this (Figure 2.6). Among leaders in EY settings where they had made changes to the curriculum or teaching practices, most agreed that the reforms had improved teaching.

Figure 2.6 How leaders felt the reforms impacted the quality of teaching

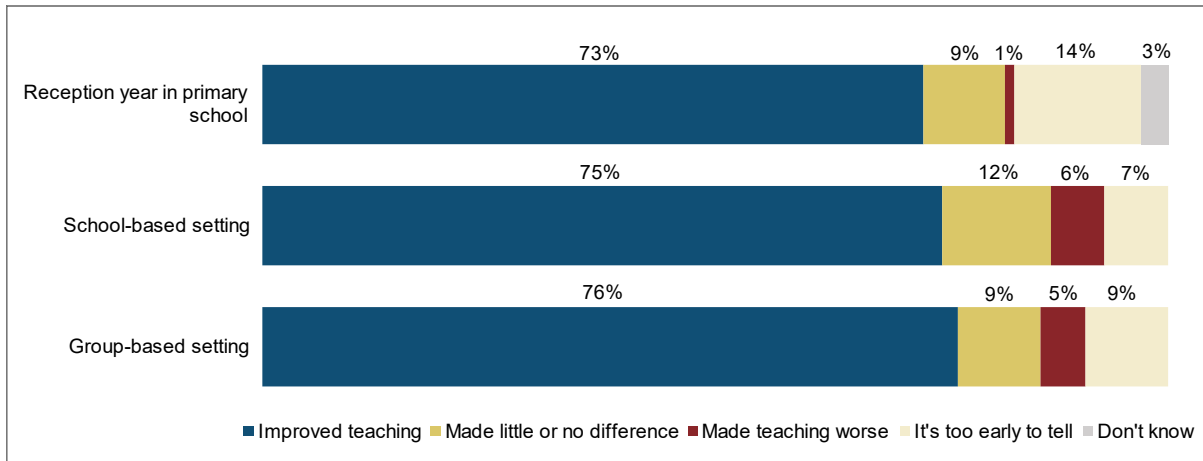


Base: A9: All leaders who had changed curriculum or teaching practices. Reception (574), School-based (638), Group-based (327), Childminders (266)

Reception and school-based leaders were most likely to think that the reforms had improved the quality of teaching (80% and 79% respectively), followed by group-based settings and childminders (74% and 69% respectively). Childminders were more likely than leaders from other settings to feel that the reforms had made little or no difference to the quality of teaching (15%), whilst leaders at group-based settings were most likely to feel that the reforms had made teaching worse (5%) when compared to leaders from other settings.

Among staff in EY settings, where they had made changes to the curriculum or teaching practices, it was broadly agreed that the reforms had improved the quality of teaching (76% of group-based staff, 75% of school-based staff, and 73% of reception staff). Staff who had been working in EY for 3-5 years were more likely to think teaching had improved (88%), when compared with those who had been working in EY for more than 5 years (74%).

Figure 2.7 How staff felt the reforms impacted the quality of teaching



Base: A9: All staff respondents who had changed curriculum or teaching practices. Reception (146), School-based (84), Group-based (109)

Changes made to curriculum/learning and development approaches: qualitative findings

Participants in the qualitative interviews were asked about what changes they had made following the reforms to their curriculum/learning and development approaches. Across all setting types, it was common for settings to tailor their curriculum/learning and development approaches depending on the needs of the children. This was beneficial for staff as they were able to cover a range of topics in depth as well as explore the topics more organically depending on the children.

Case Study: “It’s allowed us greater flexibility to meet the needs of the children.”

Gideon* is a leader at a group-based setting, with more than 5 years’ experience in the EY sector.

He found that the reforms allowed his setting to create a curriculum that worked with the children’s level, rather than focusing exclusively on age bands. Gideon worked on writing the curriculum, using the framework as his guide to help create it. He targeted the key areas they knew they needed to hit to help the children develop, building on that to ensure that the children were school-ready and learning life skills. Because the new guidance and framework were more flexible, it allowed him to address areas he saw as problem areas with the children in his setting.

After an unannounced Ofsted visit, Gideon felt confident in his setting’s new curriculum and was pleased with an improved ‘Good’ rating.

**name has been changed for anonymity*

One childminder gave the example that a child might have seen a programme with dinosaurs the day before, which would then influence the theme for part of the day. Equally, if a child mentioned they liked pirates, they would work to tailor their activities around this interest as there is more time available to staff and more flexibility in their curriculum.

We adjusted the way we look at individuals when planning - rather than one department doing a theme on animals, we look at what the children are interested in, and their areas of developmental needs - *Leader, Group-based setting*

Other changes made following the reforms included all settings focusing more on key areas including language and communication, mathematics and personal, social and emotional development (PSED), and reception settings focusing more on phonics. For example, participants welcomed the importance placed on language and communication in the reforms, as they perceived it helped improve children’s vocabulary and their communication skills.

[We] are really hot on where children are in their speech and language, so we know where the focus needs to be - *Staff, School-based setting*

The curriculum has changed quite a bit within maths, and I have been sent on a few courses which has been good because it has opened my eyes to teaching maths in early years - *Staff, Reception*

Leaders and staff also noted the increased use of Development Matters, particularly in support for literacy and numeracy. The benefits of using Development Matters mentioned included the coverage of a broader age groups, as well good coverage of literacy and numeracy which ensured children received more in-depth knowledge. A few participants also mentioned that using Development Matters gave them confidence that their children would reach their goals at the end of the year and that, as staff, they were doing the right thing.

I used Development Matters years ago and it almost went out of favour. But now since they've brought it back and they've sort of categorised it as 0-3, 3-4, it makes it much easier to actually place the children where they are - *Leader, Childminder*

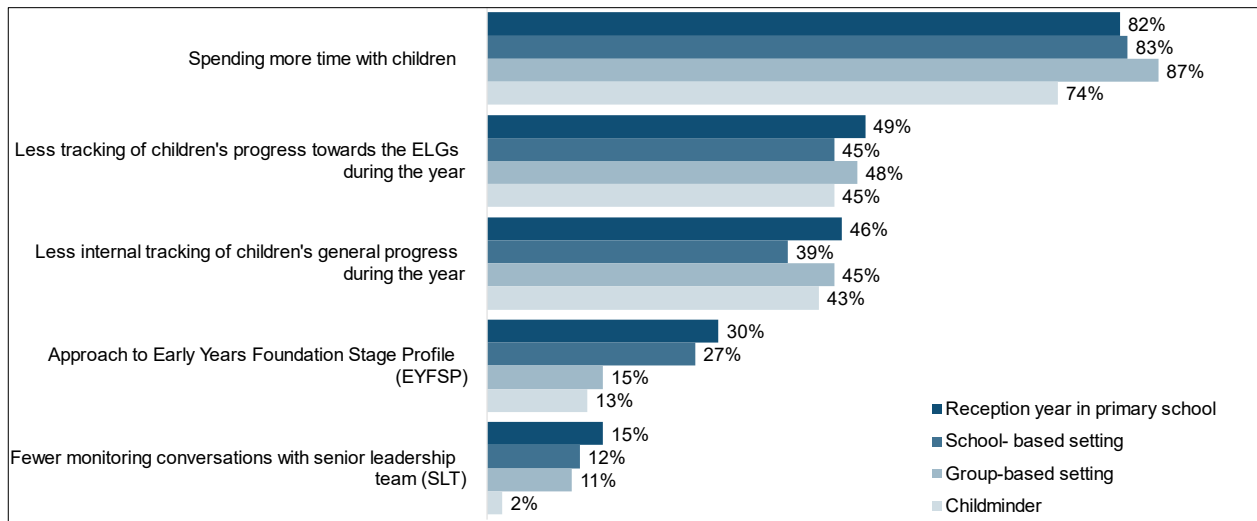
Whilst broadly leaders and staff were positive about the changes made to the curriculum and were appreciative of the trust placed on their professional judgements, there were some concerns raised about the potential for lack of consistency.

[The new framework] leaves a lot up to interpretation and I find that because a lot of it [is] open to interpretation but not everyone interprets it in the same way... I feel more vulnerable in backing up what I know - *Leader, Childminder*

Changes made to assessment practices

Among leaders who reported that their assessment practices had changed following of the reforms, the majority said that spending more time with children was the primary way that their assessment practices had changed. This was more common among leaders in group-based, school-based, and reception settings (87%, 83% and 82% respectively), than among childminders (74%).

Figure 2.8 Main ways that leaders assessment practices changed after the reforms



Base: A10. All leaders whose assessment practice has changed due to EYFS Reforms. Reception (n=803), School-based (n=975), Group-based (n=513), Childminder (n=498).

Just under half of leaders across the settings felt that assessment practices had changed with less tracking of children’s progress towards the ELGs (49% of reception leaders, 45% of school-based leaders, 48% of group-based leaders, and 45% of childminders)³.

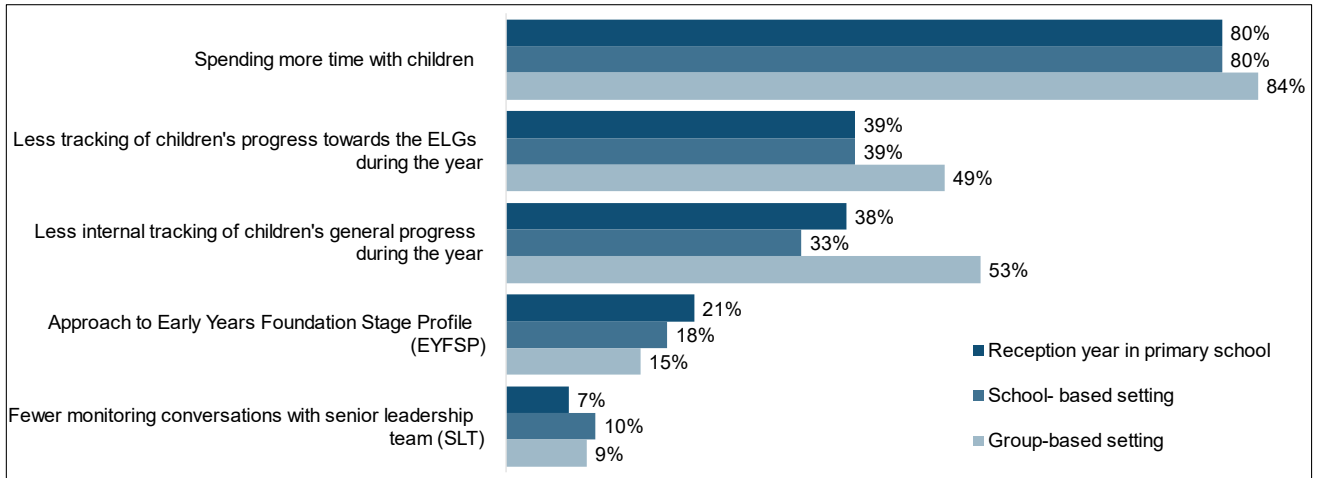
Just under half of reception and group-based leaders also reported less internal tracking of children’s ‘general’ progress during the year (46% and 45% respectively), whilst slightly fewer school-based leaders and childminders reported this (39% and 43% respectively).

Staff were also asked what had changed regarding their assessment practices since the reforms. Staff gave similar responses to leaders (Figure 2.9), with the majority reporting that they were spending more time with children (81%) followed by there being less internal tracking of children’s progress towards ELGs (42%)⁴.

³ It is important to note that the DfE do not expect the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) to be used before the end of EYFS (usually used in reception year).

⁴ Ibid

Figure 2.9 Main ways that staff assessment practices changed after the reforms



Base: A10: All staff whose assessment practice has changed due to EYFS Reforms (n=389)

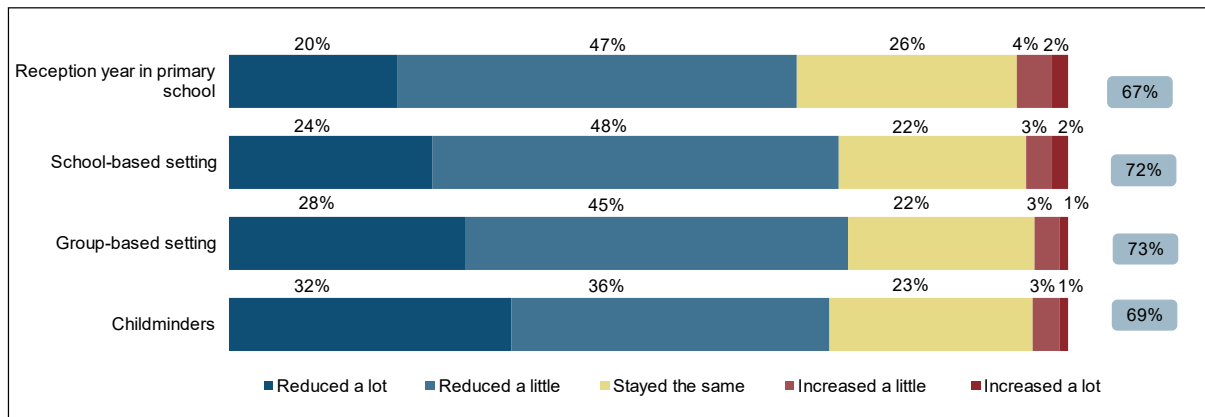
Staff from group-based settings were more likely than other settings to report that their assessment practices changed through:

- Spending more time with children (84% compared to 80% for both reception and school-based leaders).
- Less internal tracking of children's general progress (49% compared to 39% for both reception and school-based leaders).
- Less tracking of children's progress towards the ELGs (53% compared to 38% of reception and 33% of school-based leaders).

Time spent on assessments and other paperwork

Leaders were asked how their time, and their staff's time, spent completing assessments has changed since the reforms. Over two-thirds of leaders from all types of setting felt that their time spent on assessments had reduced after the reforms. Leaders from group-based and school-based settings were most likely to feel that their time had reduced (73% and 72% respectively), followed by childminders (69%) and reception leaders (67%).

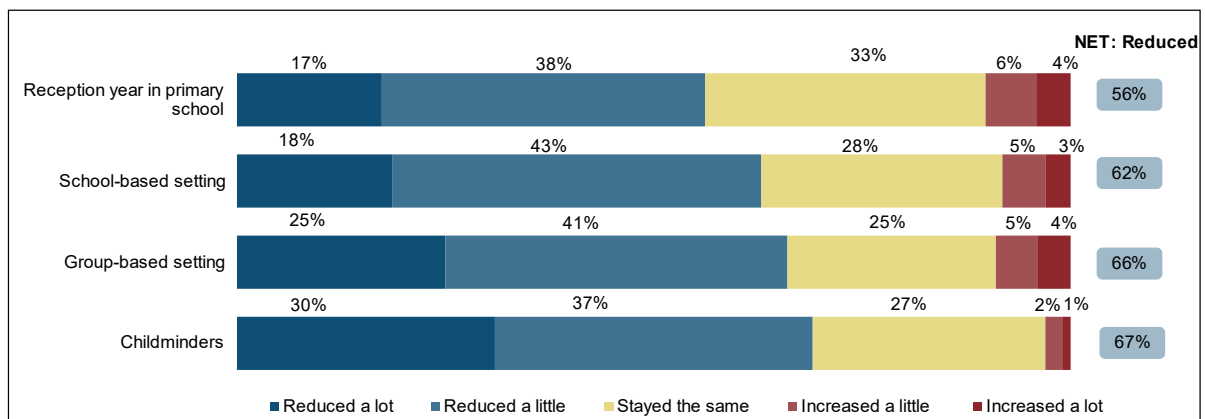
Figure 2.10 Leaders responses to how their time and their staff’s time spent completing assessments changed after the reforms



Base: B1_1. All leaders. Reception (n=923); School-based (n=1112); Group-based (n=634); Childminder (n=827)

Leaders were also asked how their time and their staff’s time spent completing ‘other paperwork’ (i.e. other than assessments) has changed since the reforms. Over half of all settings reported that their time spent on ‘other paperwork’ had reduced (Figure 2.11), with childminders and group-based leaders being most likely to report a reduction (67% and 66% respectively) when compared with the other settings (62% of school-based leaders and 56% of reception leaders).

Figure 2.11 Leaders responses to how their time spent completing ‘other paperwork’ changed after the reforms



Base: B1_2. All leaders. Reception (n=923); School-based (n=1112); Group-based (n=634); Childminder (n=827)

Staff were also asked about how their time spent completing assessments and ‘other paperwork’ has changed since the reforms. Two-thirds reported that the time spent completing assessments has decreased (63%), and this was highest among staff from group-based settings (73%). Just under two-thirds of staff reported reduced time completing ‘other paperwork’ (58%).

In the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff noted that following the reforms they were spending less time completing assessments and writing up the paperwork.

It has literally halved the time we spend doing this. Also previously, staff would take the photograph and they would be trying to write and tick boxes on the spot. Now they just write a line and are much more in the room with the children. They get half an hour in the office a week to write anything else and they all find that's plenty of time. – *Staff, Group-based setting*

We don't record as much, there isn't as much evidence, that means that there is more time for teaching and more time for interactions with the children. That's been a huge change ... the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants are freed up to spend time with the children as opposed to constantly taking pictures and recording. – *Leader, Reception*

As a result of this, leaders and staff also spent less time going through this paperwork with parents. A handful noted that this was a positive move because parents did not require the level of information that they were previously providing.

Before I would have one document for each of the parents and would highlight and go through to show them where their child has done well and advanced and where they need to work on. I don't do that now because I don't need to, and it was incredibly time consuming. They get a simplified sheet now. - *Leader, Childminder*

By reducing the termly reports that some parents don't even read it's definitely reduced work for myself in that area. – *Leader, Childminder*

Case Study: “It used to be a very tick list approach. Instead we moved to an approach where we would just record what we deemed the 'wow' moments.”

Hilary* is a staff member at a school-based setting, with 3 years' experience in early years settings, and worked at an early adopter school.

She found that the reforms allowed staff to focus less on observations and focus more on working with the children and focusing on what she called those 'wow' moments, where a child demonstrates a notable step forward in their development. Hilary also noted that the extra time saved was able to help staff prioritise communication and language development for children.

Whilst she noted they still use things some online tracking tools to support them it was now used primarily as a communication tool with parents rather than for observations.

**name has been changed for anonymity*

Rather than recording everything the children do, many participants said that they now record the 'wow moments' - these are moments in the day where the child does something the practitioners think would be particularly interesting to parents or in terms of development. They also said that this method of doing assessments placed more trust in their professional judgement, which they appreciated.

Previously you felt that you constantly had to have evidence to prove a child could do a certain thing by a certain point, and it was more paper based, whereas now there's been a lot more trust handed back to the teacher. - *Leader, School-based setting*

It used to be a very tick list approach. Instead, we moved to an approach where we would just record what we deemed the 'wow' moments. - *Staff, School-based setting*

The qualitative interviews included some leaders and staff who reported in the survey that their time spent completing assessments and paperwork had not reduced and had either stayed the same or increased. One key reason for this was that leaders and staff were still required to complete a lot of paperwork for children with SEND. This was most often raised among leaders, childminders, and,

understandably, was more common in settings with high numbers of children with SEND. They noted that evidence was still needed by external agencies for their own evaluations and assessments (such as speech and language therapists, paediatricians, or social workers), but as less internal tracking was done, this evidence took longer to complete.

The amount of paperwork that you have to do to get a child assessed or looked at, or somebody to come out and just see, observe, what they are going through...the paperwork is absolutely enormous; it takes hours. - *Leader, Group-based setting*

We know our children, but we need evidence to submit to agencies. Paediatricians for example get in touch to find out what level their children are at. This includes speech and language therapists, social workers, family workers and local authority, funding outcomes. – *Leader, Group-based setting*

Some leaders and staff also mentioned more generally that their time spent completing assessments and paperwork had not reduced because they were required by their school or senior leadership team to still fill out assessment paperwork. This was because the school or leadership team felt that assessment paperwork was still needed to monitor the children's progress effectively and they wanted to be able to share this with parents, despite this not being a requirement under the EYFS framework.

Although time having to complete assessments for the local authority has been taken away, I'm still having to complete them for the senior leadership team every half term. - *Leader, Reception*

We set a standard within a setting of how an assessment should be written so it has pretty much stayed the same because we still have to write them just exactly how we did, so we do them seasonally ... our directors are very passionate about us writing them. - *Leader, Group-based setting*

A handful of leaders and staff also said that their time spent completing assessments and related paperwork had not reduced because they had already made these changes in advance of the roll out of the reforms.

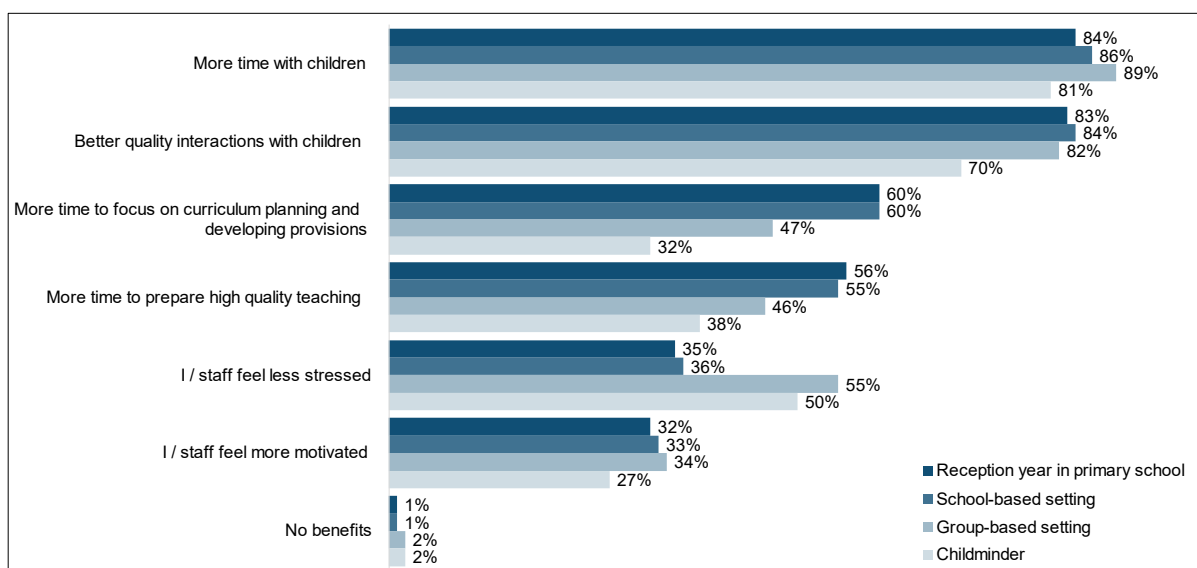
Benefits of spending less time on paperwork

Spending more time with children, and better-quality interactions with children were the main benefits of reduced paperwork (this is the case for both assessment paperwork and other more general paperwork). The majority of leaders reported that more time with children was a benefit of spending less time on paperwork (89% of group-based settings, 86% of school-based leaders, 84% of reception leaders, and

81% of childminders). This was closely followed by improved quality interactions with children, although reception, school-based and group-based leaders (83%, 84% and 82% respectively) were more likely than childminders (70%) to report this as a benefit.

Childminders were less likely than all other settings to report that they had more time to focus on curriculum planning and develop provisions, more time to prepare high quality teaching, and that they/their staff felt more motivated (32%, 38% and 27% respectively). Both group-based leaders and childminders (55% and 50% respectively) were more likely than reception leaders and school-based leaders (35% and 36% respectively) to report that they/their staff feel less stressed as a result of spending less time on paperwork.

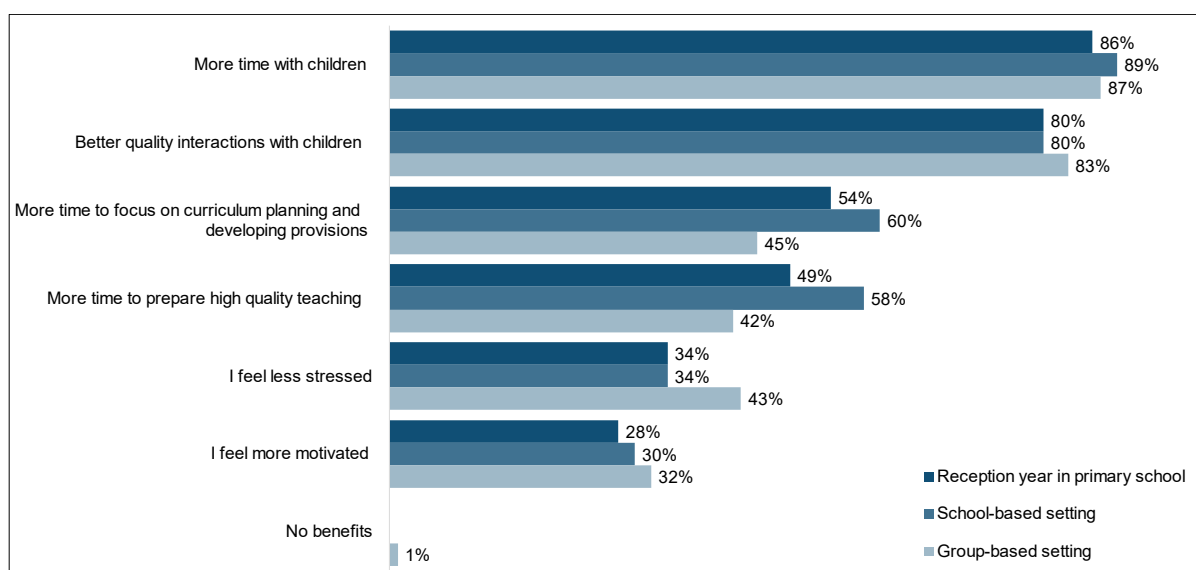
Figure 2.12 Leaders’ reported benefits of spending less time on paperwork



Base: B2. All leaders who said their time completing assessments and other paperwork had reduced as a result of the EYFS reforms. Reception (n=693); School-based (n=885); Group-based (n=509); Childminder (n=628). Responses <4% overall not shown.

Similarly to leaders, staff were most likely to report that time with children and better quality interactions with children were the most common benefits of spending less time on assessment and other paperwork (87% and 81% respectively). The third most common benefit that staff reported was that it allowed teachers more time to focus on curriculum planning and developing provisions (52%). However this was less likely to be mentioned by group-based staff (45%) compared to staff in reception and school-based settings.

Figure 2.13 Staff reported benefits of spending less time on paperwork



Base: B2. All respondents who said their time completing assessments and other paperwork had reduced as a result of the EYFS reforms. Reception (n=134); School-based (n=83); Group-based (n=125). Responses <4% overall not shown.

In line with the surveys, the qualitative interview findings also highlighted the importance of increased time with children. Leaders and staff highlighted that their relationships and interactions with the children improved, which led to better overall interactions. They reported that the increased time spent with children benefited children’s language development, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, where this could be below the expected level.

[The reforms have] enabled adults to spend more time communicating with [the children] which will cause the best outcomes for them further on, especially for children who are not from communication rich homes – *Staff, School-based setting*

I think for the children [the reforms have] helped their communication and language and it's helped their personal relationships and their social skill so that's been a big shift we've seen – *Leader, Reception*

As leaders and staff were engaging with children more, and interacting with them, they felt they were better able to respond to the child’s needs.

We've adopted a kind of in the moment planning aspect. Where before we kind of have some key themes, we would pull out and everything was kind of written and planned for using the previous documentation... the new framework has kind of taken that away, now that is up to us to determine what children need. - *Staff, Group-based setting*

Some staff reported that being able to focus more on the children allowed them to identify children who were not progressing as well as they should. As leaders and staff had better overall knowledge of the children and were interacting with them more on a day-to-day basis, they were able to pick up on issues more quickly.

In the new reforms, you're better able to identify children who are not hitting the bar ... [it is] more identifiable which children need extra help. - *Leader, Group-based setting*

Those who reported that the reduced assessment paperwork had allowed them to have better relationships with children, often highlighted improved parent-staff communications as well. Whilst some participants used various programmes, to upload photos for example, others said they were talking more with parents to ensure that they were kept up to date on their child's progress, and were finding it easier to talk to parents about their child's development.

A lot more conversations are possible with parents [after the reforms]. – *Leader, Reception*

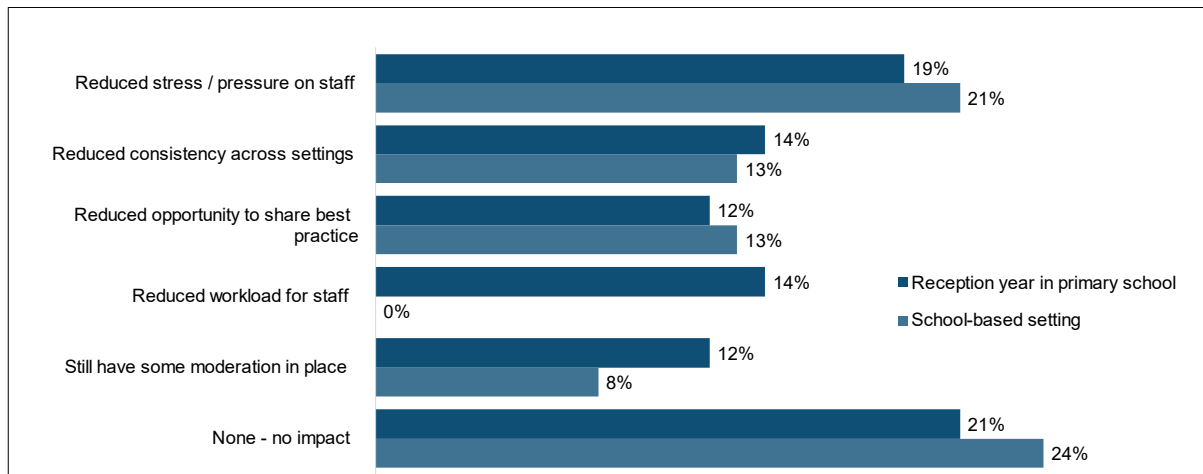
We made a massive focus on parent partnerships within the setting, so we now do parents evenings every term, we have a parent suggestion box outside the nursery – *Leader, Group-based setting*

Local authority moderation

Leaders in reception and school-based settings were asked what impacts, if any, they thought had resulted from the removal of the statutory duty for LAs to externally moderate 25% of EYFS profile judgments made by schools in their local area.

In school-based settings and reception settings, 17% (for both) reported that they did not know what impact the removal had had. Excluding those who did not know, (Figure 2.14) just over one in five reported that the removal of LA statutory moderation had no impact (21% of reception settings, and 24% of school-based settings). The most common impact reported across both settings was a reduction in stress and pressure on staff (19% of school-based leaders and 21% of reception leaders).

Figure 2.14 Impact of the removal of local authority statutory moderation



Base: D7. All leaders in school-based settings (excluding those who said 'don't knows'). Reception (n=760); School-based (n=831). Responses from Group-based settings (34) and Childminders (1) to this question were removed during analysis and are excluded from these findings.

LAs were asked what impacts, if any, they thought had resulted from the removal of LA statutory moderation from the EYFS profile on the quality of EY education. Half (50%) thought that this had had a negative impact on the quality of EY education, with a further 32% reporting that it was too early to tell. Those who reported the impact had been negative were most likely to say it had reduced opportunities for shared practice (43%), lowered standards (39%) and created a lack of consistency (35%). Of the three LAs that thought the impact had been positive, two reported that staff were less stressed, and one said it had increased professional confidence.

LAs were also asked what impacts, if any, the removal of LA statutory moderation has had on the workloads of EY leaders and teachers. One-third of LAs thought this has had no impact on the workloads of EY leaders and teachers (34%). Another third thought it was too early to tell (35%). 14% thought it had decreased workloads and 10% thought it has increased workloads.

LAs were also asked what impacts, if any, the removal of LA statutory moderation has had on their relationship with EY leaders and teachers. Two-fifths (40%) thought there had been no change. A further 26% thought there had been a reduction in contact with EY leaders and teachers, and 17% reported that there had been a loss of support networks for staff (17%).

One-third (31%) of LAs reported they had made other changes, aside from the statutory moderation, following the reforms. The most commonly reported changes included increased training (32%), increased peer to peer support across settings (23%), and increased guidance and support (19%).

Changes made to oral health teaching

One of the EYFS reforms included a new requirement for providers to promote the good oral health of children. Settings are free to choose how they fulfil this requirement, with some suggestions in Development Matters to link the topic with other areas (such as healthy eating), using play to make children more aware of brushing teeth, or with visits from dentists.

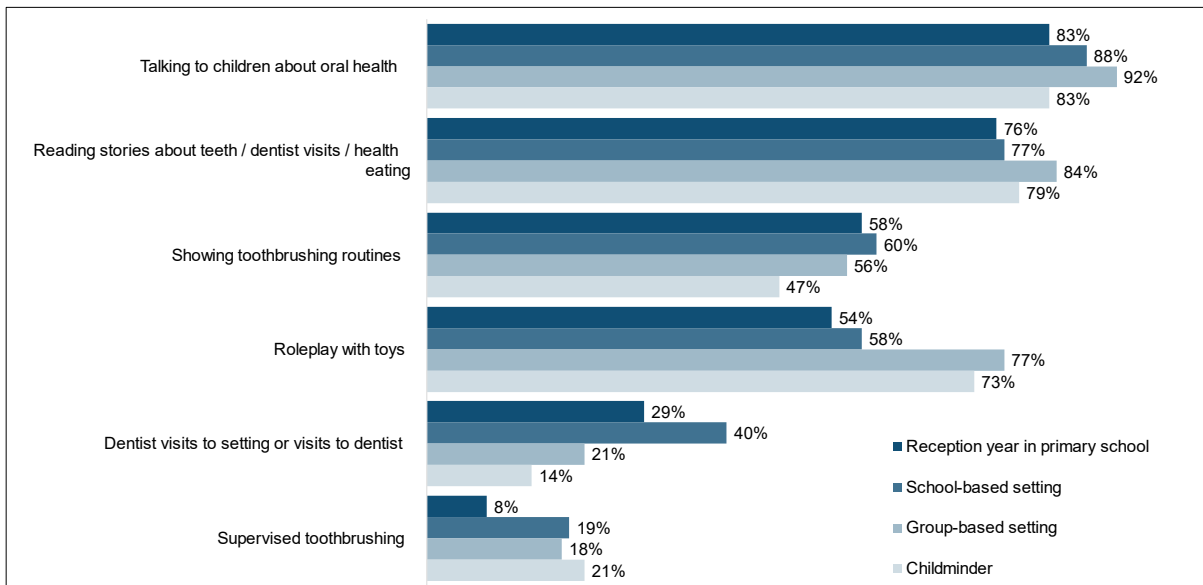
Nearly three-fifths of all group-based and school-based leaders reported making changes to their oral health teaching (58% and 56%). The incidence was slightly lower for reception leaders and childminders, with just under half having reported making such changes (48% and 47%).

Similar to leaders, half of staff across all EY settings reported making changes to oral health teaching following the reforms. This was highest for group-based and reception staff (53% and 52%) but was lower for staff in school-based settings (43%).

When asked about what new activities leaders had implemented in their settings, the primary change across all settings was talking more to children about their oral health, closely followed by reading stories about teeth, dentist visits, and healthy eating (Figure 2.15).

Group-based leaders (92%) were more likely than all other settings (83% of reception leaders, 88% of school-based leaders, and 83% of childminders) to report that they were talking to children about oral health. School-based leaders (40%) were more likely than all other settings (29% of reception leaders, 21% of group-based leaders, and 14% of childminders) to report that they were now having dentist visits to their setting, or visiting the dentist.

Figure 2.15 Changes leaders made to oral health teaching in their settings



Base: B8. All leaders who have changed their approach to oral health as a result of the EYFS reforms (excluding those that were already doing or don't do anything). Reception (n=484); School-based (n=613); Group-based (n=354); Childminder (n=392)

Staff were also asked about the changes they had made to oral health activities. Similarly to leaders, the most common new activity reported was talking to the children about oral health (84%) and well as reading stories about teeth/dentist visits/healthy eating (78%). New activities reported by staff were broadly the same across all EY settings, although supervised toothbrushing was more likely to happen in group-based and school-based settings (29% and 25% respectively) when compared to reception (13%).

The qualitative research also explored how changes to teaching oral health had been implemented. Oral health was increasingly incorporated as part of everyday teaching, alongside general teachings on health and hygiene. This was commonly done by talking with the children and using props and story books to stress the importance of oral health.

[We bring] cleaning teeth into everyday conversation and we have a big pretend toothbrush which we even do with the babies and cleaning the teddies teeth - *Leader, Childminder*

Some settings were also able to liaise with medical professionals, such as the school nurses and dentists in the community, to come into settings to deliver talks to the children. A few settings mentioned signing up to the Colgate scheme which offered them free resources, such as toothpastes and toothbrushes, for children to use.

We have visits from dentistry nurses, and they love it - their feedback and chatter indicate they are exceptionally well versed in the importance of oral health. - *Leader, Group-based setting*

Case Study: “I was aware of children's [oral] health, but it just made you a lot more aware - I made sure I put it into the curriculum, I do lots of fun games with it as well.”

Anika* is a childminder who has over 5 years' experience working in EY and highlighted that the introduction of oral health teaching has prompted her to make changes to their teaching.

She mentioned how she has purchased electric toothbrushes for the children and egg timers so the children can get used to how long they should be brushing their teeth for and turns it into a game to get children engaged. She also used models of teeth to show children how to effectively brush their teeth and has used stories and roleplay to make the activity more fun.

As well as activities with the children, she has worked with parents to focus on healthy eating and packing less sugary lunches. Anika found that once she spoke to parents a lot of them did not realise the sugar content in some snack bars etc. that are marketed as healthy, so was able to offer alternatives like fresh fruits or healthier bars.

**name has been changed for anonymity*

Findings show that settings faced few challenges when implementing the oral health changes, but their main concern was about the time it could take in an already busy and demanding schedule. This concern was particularly raised by childminders, with multiple childminders reporting that they felt oral health changes took up too much time in the day. A small number of providers also mentioned that brushing teeth in the setting could be unhygienic, and they were conscious of spreading illness (especially in the wake of Covid-19). A few also noted that some parents could be resistant to this change. For example, one setting reported that some parents pushed back when they made the decision to only give children water, and not juice, as they had concerns that their children would refuse to stay hydrated.

A handful of providers reported they had made changes but questioned the need to do so. They did not think it was within their remit to teach oral health and it should instead be addressed by health services or parents.

The gap is the fact that the health visitors aren't doing home visits and that lots of families don't get home visits and they don't have the same health visitors. - *Leader, School-based setting*

I don't feel really is our place to teach children about their oral health. It's when their parents take them to the dentist that they need to learn about that is my honest opinion. - *Staff, Group-based setting*

Where settings reported they had not made changes to oral health teaching, the most common reason for this was that they already had these practices in place.

With oral health, we had always been on top of it. We've always encouraged the children to brush their teeth after lunch. I have personally encouraged all my parents to register with the dentist. - *Leader, Childminder*

3. Barriers experienced and ongoing issues

This chapter explores how easy or difficult leaders and staff found implementing the new requirements, as well as the barriers that leaders and staff have experienced, and are continuing to experience, in relation to the implementation of the EYFS reforms. This chapter also covers the barriers faced by LAs in offering support and if and how they have been able to overcome them.

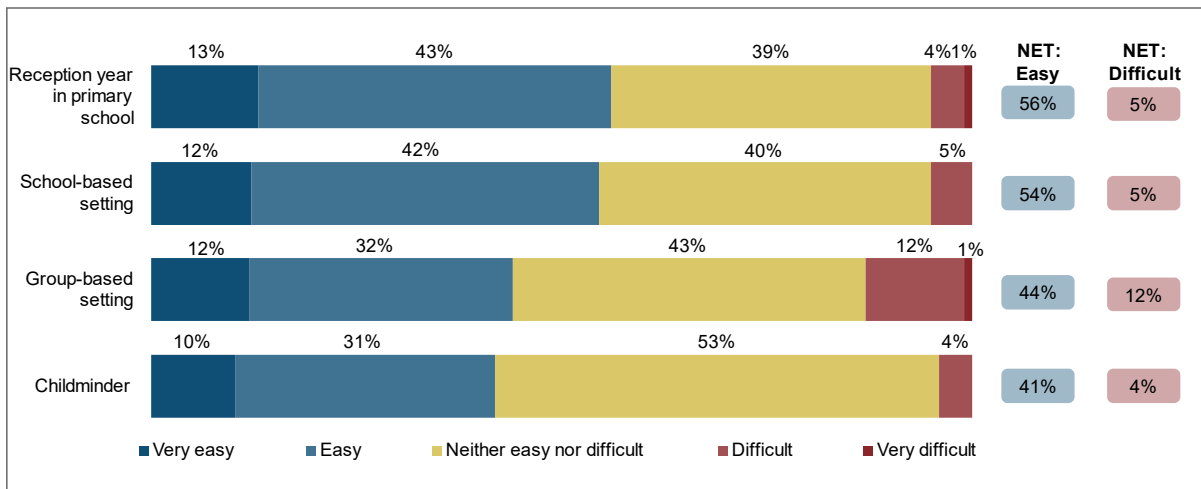
Summary of findings:

- The majority of leaders in all settings reported that implementing the new requirements was neither easy nor difficult. The same applied to staff.
- Most leaders did not face barriers to implementing the new requirements, with childminders being the least likely to report barriers. Similarly, the majority of staff reported that they also did not experience barriers.
- Among both leaders in all settings and staff who experienced barriers, a lack of time to implement the changes, or having other priorities, was the most common barrier.
- Over six-in-ten leaders across all settings reported that they had partially overcome their barriers. Over seven-in-ten staff reported the same.
- In the qualitative interviews with leaders and staff, common barriers mentioned included, a lack of time, lack of guidance, various staffing issues, and a lack of support.

Ease of implementing the new requirements

Leaders were asked how easy or difficult they found implementing the new requirements within the EYFS. There were some differences in views, with those in reception and school-based settings more likely than leaders from group-based settings and childminders to report that implementing the new requirements was easy (56% and 54% of reception and school-based settings, compared with 44% and 41% of group-based settings and childminders). As shown in Figure 3.1 /difficulty in implementing the new requirements within the , a substantial proportion of leaders from all settings reported that it was neither easy nor difficult. Only a minority reported that it was difficult. Group-based settings were more likely than the other settings to report that implementation was difficult (12%, compared to 5% of school-based settings and 4% of both reception settings and childminders).

Figure 3.1 Ease/difficulty in implementing the new requirements within the EYFS



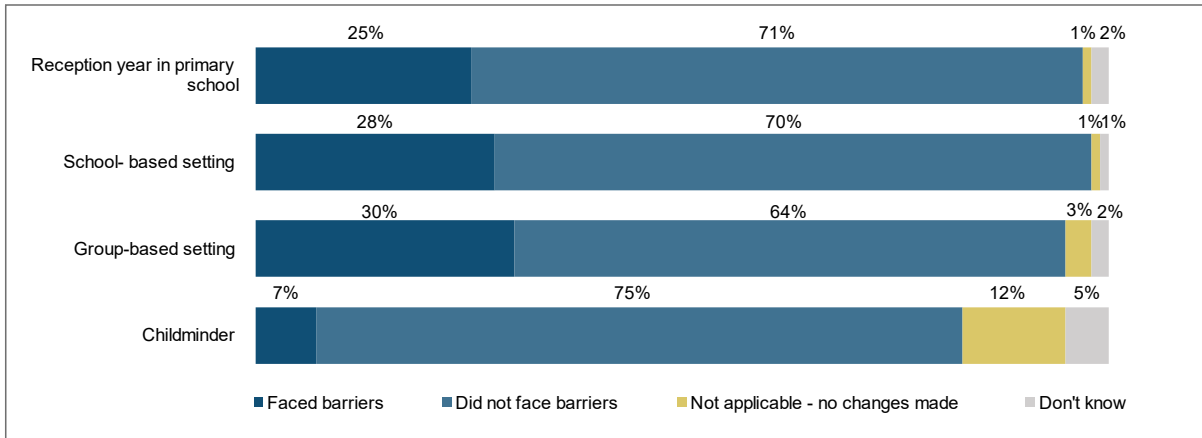
Base: A2. All leaders who were knowledgeable about the reforms. Reception (n=915); School-based (n=1104); Group-based (n=621); Childminder (n=781).

Over half of staff (52%) found implementing the new requirements easy, followed by 40% who found it neither easy nor difficult, and 7% who found it difficult. Reported ease was similar across all setting types: reception (52%), school-based settings (48%), and group-based settings (56%).

Barriers experienced by leaders and staff

Positively, most leaders across reception (71%), school-based settings (70%), group-based settings (64%) and childminders (75%) reported that they did not face any barriers to implementation (Figure 3.2). Childminders were the least likely to report that they faced barriers (7%, compared to reception settings, 25%, school-based settings, 28%, and group-based settings, 30%).

Figure 3.2 Barriers or difficulties experienced by leaders in amending their curriculum, approaches, or practices to reflect the reforms

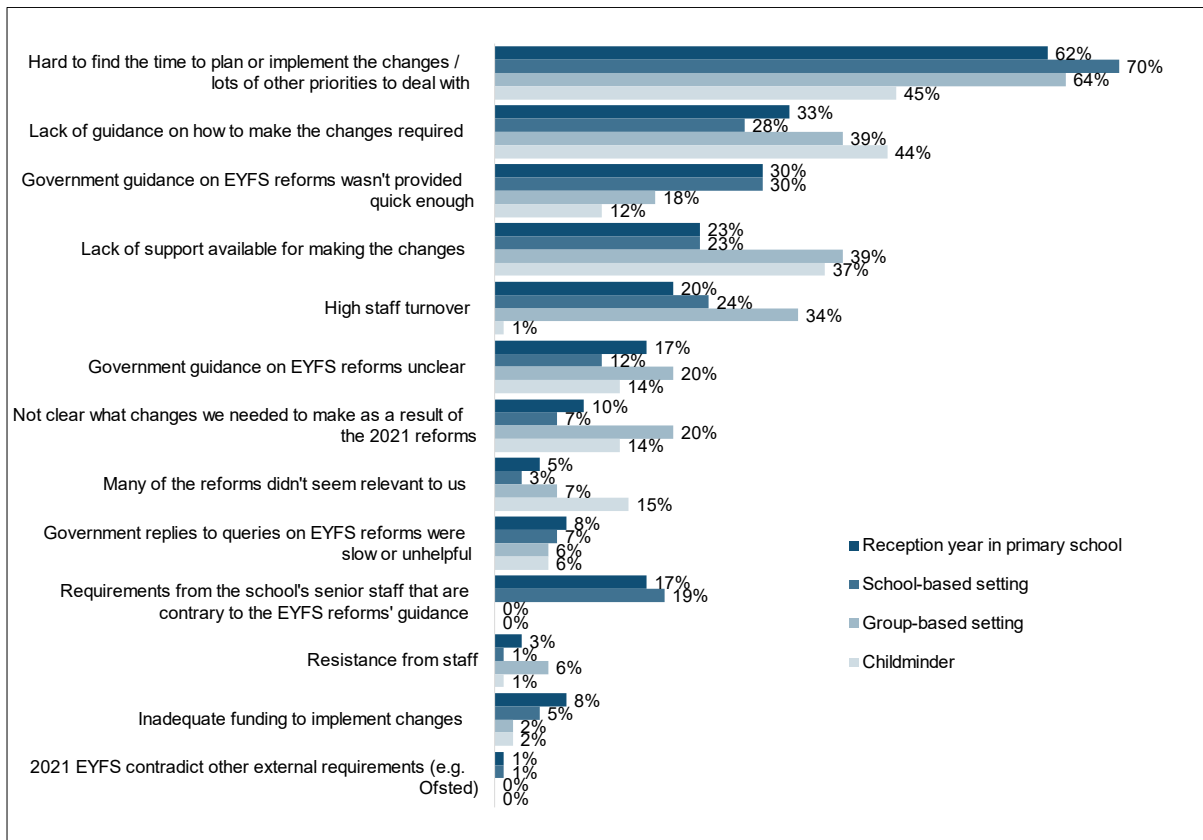


Base: A3. All leaders. Reception (n=923); School-based (n=1112); Group-based (n=634); Childminder (n=827).

As with leaders, most staff (68%) also reported that they did not face any barriers to implementation of the reforms. Similar again to leaders across settings, a quarter (26%) felt there was a barrier of some kind. This was at a similar level across all setting types: reception (25%), school-based settings (24%), and group-based settings (29%).

Among leaders that did report experiencing barriers, lack of time was the biggest issue cited (Figure 3.3). Leaders in reception (62%), school-based settings (70%), and group-based settings (64%) were more likely than childminders (45%) to report time as a barrier. Group-based settings and childminders (39% and 37% respectively) were more likely than leaders in reception settings and school-based settings (both 23%) to report lack of support as a barrier.

Figure 3.3 Barriers faced by leaders regarding implementing the reforms



Base: A4. All leaders who have experienced barriers in amending curriculum approach or practices to reflect EYFS reforms. Reception (n=229); School-based (n=309); Group-based (n=188); Childminder (n=61). This chart shows only the top 6 barriers reported.

Leaders were also asked if they were able to overcome these barriers. Over six-in-ten leaders across all settings reported that they had partially overcome their barriers, reception (61%), school-based settings (63%), group-based settings (65%) and childminders (63%). Leaders in reception and school-based settings (35% and 33%, respectively) were more likely than those in group-based settings and childminders (23% and 15%, respectively) to report that they had overcome the barriers completely. At the other end of the scale, leaders in group-based settings and childminders (11% and 18%, respectively) were more likely than those in reception and school-based settings (both 3%) to report that they had not overcome their barriers.

Staff reported similar barriers to leaders, with most stating that they lacked time to implement the changes or had other priorities (61%, although this did drop to 50% of staff in a reception setting)⁵. This was followed by a lack of guidance on how to make the changes required (43%), a lack of support available for making the changes (37%), and the government guidance being unclear (21%). One-fifth (20%) also

⁵ For context the new EYFS framework was published on the 31 March 2021 and it was requested that it be used by all Ofsted registered early years providers in England from 1 September 2021.

reported that requirements from senior staff being contrary to the guidance was a barrier. Reception staff were twice as likely as the rest (42%) to report this as a barrier to implementation.⁶

When staff were asked if they had overcome these barriers, 72% reported that they had partially overcome them, 15% reported that they had completely overcome them, whilst 11% said that they had not.

Findings from the qualitative interviews regarding barriers faced when implementing the reforms largely matched those found in the quantitative surveys. Common barriers mentioned by interviewees included a lack of time, lack of guidance, various staffing issues, and a lack of support.

Not feeling like there was enough time to implement the reforms often came about when settings felt pressured to implement changes quickly. This was particularly prevalent among group-based settings.

It would have been better if the changes had been implemented gradually. –
Leader, Childminder

Lacking time was often because they had to prioritise other matters, including the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children. For example, participants reported that children were coming into EY with delayed language skills and behaviours, as well as there being an increased number of safeguarding concerns, and this was absorbing a substantial amount of time.

[Due to Covid/lockdown] We were having to prioritise speech and language issues over and above all of the other changes at that time - *Staff, Group-based*

A lack of time was further exacerbated among settings that reported they had to make wide scale changes to their approach following the reforms. For example, some reported that they needed to completely re-write their curriculum.

When you're completely re-writing a curriculum you need time to do that if you want to actually resource and implement something that's completely different. - *Leader, Reception*

Interviewees who felt the government guidance was vague mentioned that this was primarily because it was unclear which aspects of the reforms were relevant to their settings. They also said the government guidance was unclear in terms of what good implementation of the reforms looked like, in a practical sense, and what their overall

⁶ Please note respondents were able to choose multiple responses at this questions so percentages will total more than 100%.

expectations were, specifically in regard to what Ofsted would be looking for. Again, this barrier was more often reported by group-based providers.

It's hard to know what is applicable to our children and how these changes would be implemented in reality. – *Leader, Group-based*

Not a lot of clarity on what Ofsted want regarding evidencing cross-curriculum subjects, and subject leaders don't necessarily understand how the EYFS framework works, so ask for written evidence as security just in case Ofsted ask for it. - *Staff, School-based*

There were also various staffing issues that were identified by participants as being barriers to implementing the reforms. The most common staffing issue was that settings had high staff turnover and it was difficult to recruit replacements, likely due to the current issues related to EY recruitment. Where they were able to recruit, new staff were unfamiliar with the EYFS reforms, and they had to be trained on the framework which was time-consuming.

Further to this, there were also interviewees who noted that their senior leadership teams within the settings were acting as a barrier to implementation. This was mainly because some senior leadership staff continued to be in favour of assessment paperwork, as they thought this was the best way to gather evidence on children's progress. Participants who faced this barrier felt this was because the senior leadership staff did not understand what was required. This was most often mentioned by school-based providers and reception settings.

Senior leaders don't understand early years, they don't understand that we teach differently to the national curriculum. – *Leader, Reception*

Early years professionals now have to justify what they're doing to subject leads who don't understand the early years and the reforms were not clear on how to do that. - *Leader, Reception*

There were also participants who mentioned that a general lack of support and communication was a barrier to implementing the reforms. This view was more common among leaders, compared to staff. Many of these interviewees said that they would have benefitted from more training that clarified what had to be covered following the reforms, specifically in terms of assessment and curriculum content. More detail on what support was offered, and what support is missing can be found in Section 6.

One big barrier was the lack of training, the curriculum came around at the end of the pandemic and almost felt dropped on us. It would have been nice to have more training. - *Leader, Group-based*

We're not trained teachers, we are doing what we've always done, and they are really quick to downgrade us because we can't produce the all-singing, all-dancing curriculum, but we've not been told how to word it, how to show it...and there's not enough training. - *Leader, Childminders*

It is also worth noting that in terms of barriers, the small number of qualitative interviewees who worked in early adopter settings⁷ thought that they had access to a range of support and had sufficient time to roll out the changes. Participants from early adopter schools reported using EY advisors for support, as well as informal early adopters online forums (such as on Facebook and WhatsApp). As the qualitative research was not representative, this cannot be attributed solely to the fact that they were early adopters.

[[An] informal online forum was] incredibly helpful in sharing good practice. –
Leader, School-based

⁷ These were settings that volunteered to make the EYFS reforms in the early adopter year which ran from September 2020 to August 2021.

4. Support provided to implement the reforms

This chapter explores the various types of support and guidance provided to EY leaders and staff to help them to implement the 2021 EYFS Reforms. It looks at how staff were supported by their school or nursery, what support and guidance LAs provided, and other types of support, including support from DfE. It assesses the barriers that LAs faced in terms of providing support, how useful support received has been, and highlights any support or guidance leaders and staff felt was missing.

Summary of findings:

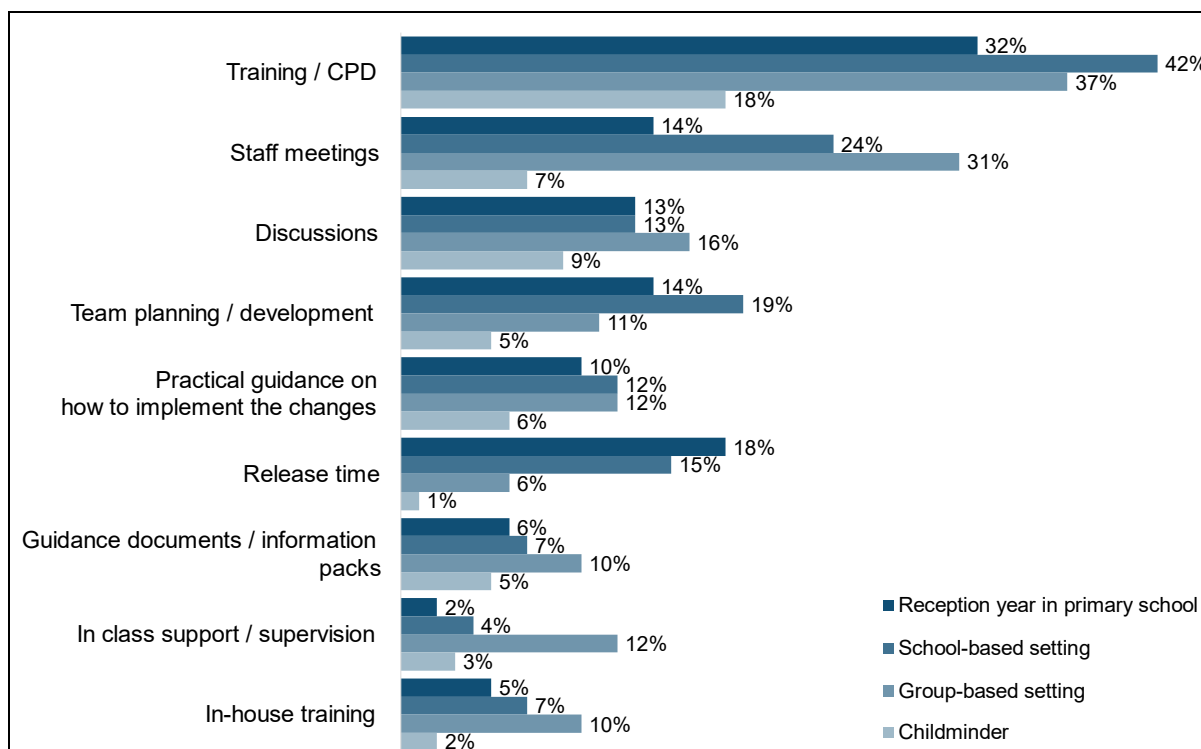
- Leaders across all settings were most likely to support their staff via training/CPD.
- Almost three-quarters of staff reported that they received support from their school or nursery, with the majority stating that this came from their leadership team.
- In terms of support from their LA, leaders most often reported that this came in the form of training. Most leaders found the support they received from their LA as useful. Among those who reported that it was not useful, most mentioned that it should provide more practical guidance and be tailored to their setting.
- Throughout the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff mentioned a range of different types of support that they received including support from local authorities, external training providers, online resources, social media, and other networks.
- During the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff noted numerous ways that support could be improved: including best practice examples, providing more training and guidance, having more extensive networks and peer support groups and support for teaching children with SEND.

Support provided by leaders, and received by staff

Leaders who lead, manage, or supervise other staff were asked what the main ways were that they supported their staff to respond to the EYFS reforms. As shown in Figure 4.1, some differences across providers were evident although leaders across all settings generally supported their staff via training and CPD (42% of school-based leaders, 37% of group-based leaders, 32% of reception leaders and 18% of childminders). Leaders in group-based settings were more likely than leaders in other settings to say they were supporting staff via staff meetings (31% vs. 24% of school-based leaders, 14% of reception leaders and 7% of childminders), guidance

documents (10% vs. 7% of school-based leaders, 6% of reception leaders and 5% of childminders) and in class support and supervision (12% vs. 4% of school-based leaders, 2% of reception leaders and 3% of childminders).

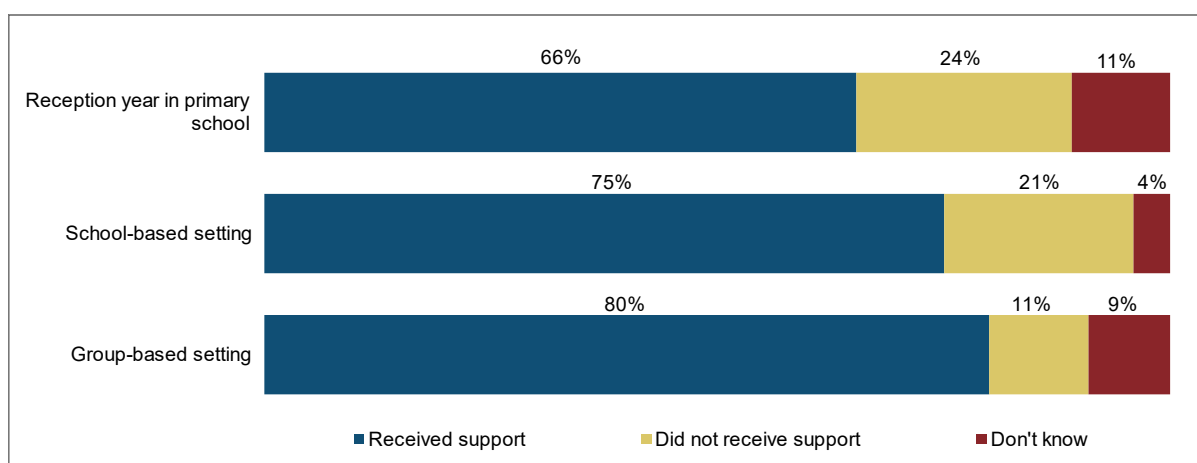
Figure 4.1 The main ways leaders supported their staff to respond to the EYFS reforms



Base: B5. What were the main ways you supported your staff to respond to the 2021 EYFS reforms? All leaders who lead, manage, or supervise other staff. Reception (n=909); School-based (n=1098); Group-based (n=631); Childminders (n=223).

Staff were also asked what support they had received from their school or nursery to implement the reforms (Figure 4.2). Almost three-quarters (73%) reported receiving support, with 19% saying they did not receive any, and 8% who did not know.

Figure 4.2 Whether staff were provided with support to implement the reforms

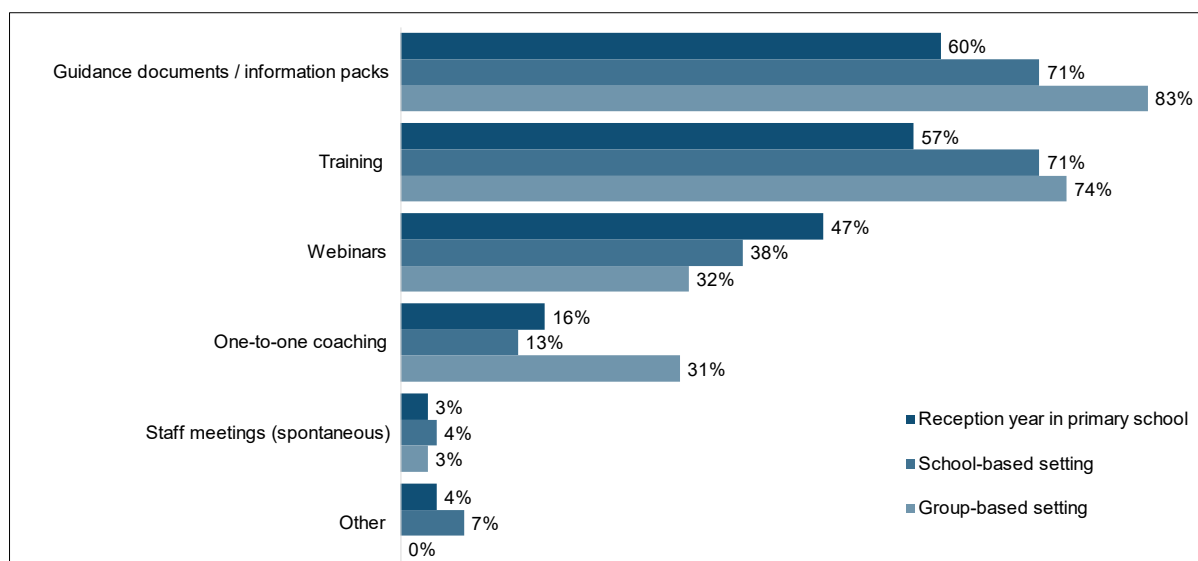


Base: B5. Has your school or nursery provided you with any support to help implement the 2021 EYFS reforms? All staff. Reception (n=199); School-based (n=112); Group-based (n=156)

Of staff that did receive support, the majority (79%) said they received this from the leadership team at their school or nursery. Around a third reported receiving support from a peer (39%), and a similar proportion from their local authority (34%).

When asked what type of support staff received from their school or nursery, the majority mentioned guidance documents/information packs (71%) and training (67%), followed by webinars (39%), and one-to-one coaching (21%). As shown in Figure 4.3, group-based settings were more likely to report that they received support through guidance documents/information packs (83%) and one-to-one coaching (31%), than staff in school-based settings (71% and 13% respectively) and staff in reception settings (60% and 16% respectively). Staff in school-based settings (71%) and in group-based settings (74%) were more likely than staff in reception settings (57%) to report that they received support through training.

Figure 4.3 How staff were supported by their school or nursery



Base: B7. What have been the main ways that your school or nursery has supported you to help implement the 2021 EYFS reforms? All respondents who have received support to help implement 2021 EYFS Reforms. Reception (n=131); School-based (n=84); Group-based (n=125)

Almost all (96%) staff who received support reported that this was helpful, with 44% reporting that it was very helpful. The remaining 4% reported that this support was not helpful.

Further detail on types of support received and support missing, as well as what makes support helpful or unhelpful, is explored later in this chapter in the section on 'Types of support received: qualitative findings'.

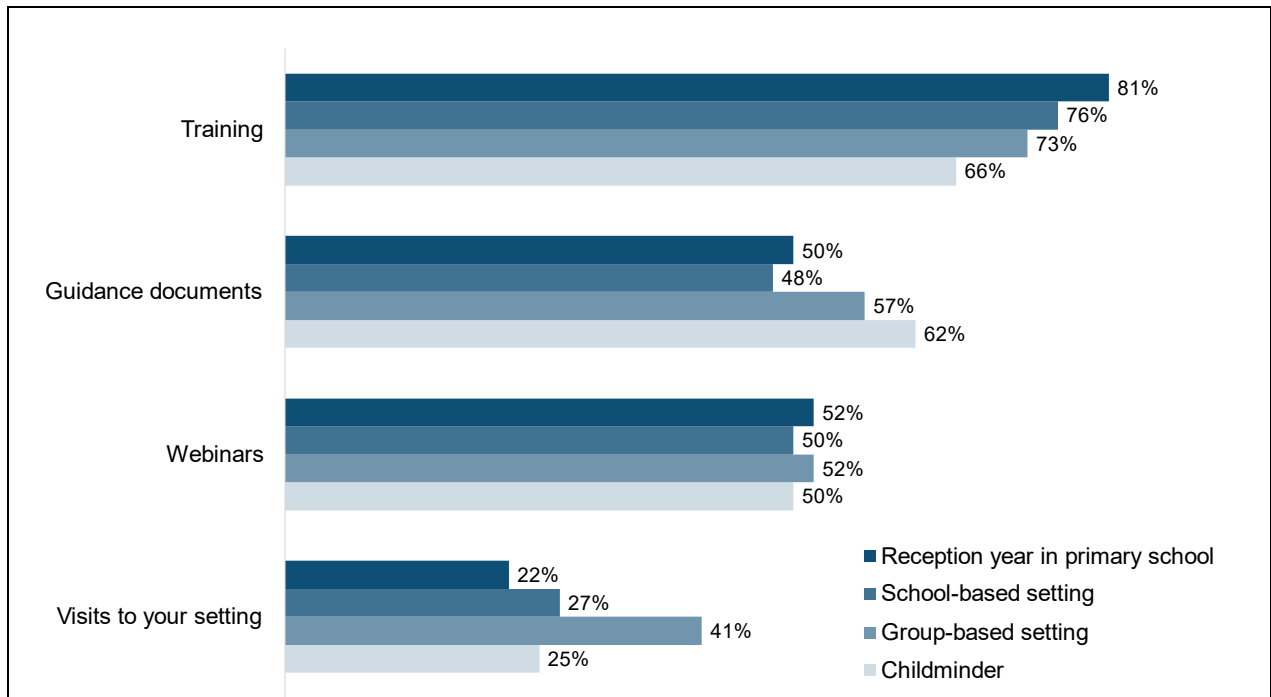
Support from local authorities

All LAs reported that they had provided support or guidance to help EY settings to implement the 2021 EYFS reforms.

Leaders were asked whether the LA had provided them or their setting with any support to implement the reforms. School-based leaders and reception leaders were more likely than group-based leaders and childminders to say they had received support from the LA (66%, 63%, 55% and 49% respectively).

When asked what support they had received from their local authority, leaders most commonly mentioned training (81% of reception leaders, 76% of school-based leaders, 73% of group-based leaders and 66% of childminders). Figure 4.4 shows that around half of leaders in all settings also reported receiving support in the form of guidance documents and webinars.

Figure 4.4 Main ways leaders felt local authorities supported EY settings



Base: D2. What have been the main ways that your local authority has supported you or your setting to help implement the 2021 EYFS reforms? All respondents whose local authority provided support. Reception (n=584); School-based (n=733); Group-based (n=348); Childminder (n=399)

When asked what support they provided to EY settings to implement the reforms and change practice, all LAs said they had hosted or facilitated webinars, network meetings, briefings or discussion forums. The vast majority also said they had signposted to relevant information (97%), offered more training for EY staff (94%) or provided guidance documents (83%). Around half said they had provided childminder groups⁸ (52%) or increased frequency of visits to EY settings (48%).

Most leaders found support from their LA useful (91% of childminders, 90% of reception leaders, 88% of school-based leaders and 88% of group-based leaders). Childminders were more likely than leaders in other settings to say it was very useful (40% vs. 33% of group-based leaders, 29% of reception leaders and 29% of school-based leaders).

Barriers experienced by local authorities in providing support

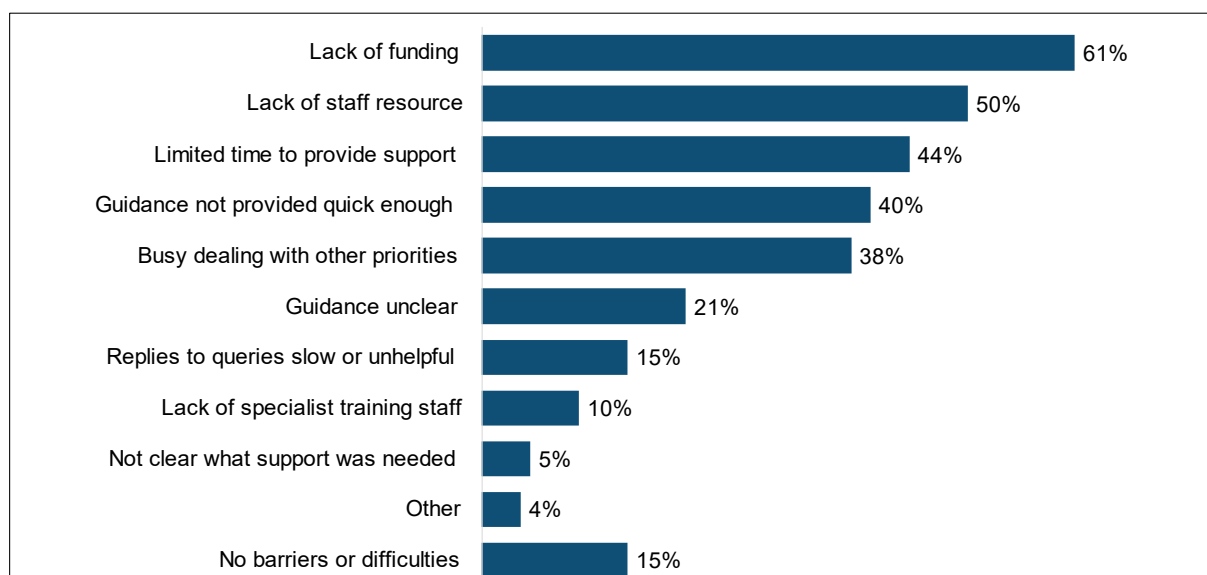
The majority of LAs reported experiencing at least one barrier to offering support⁹. As shown by Figure 4.5, the most common barrier faced was a lack of funding

⁸ These are informal groups to allow childminders to share learning and information about the reforms.

⁹ For context, almost all local authorities (151/152) were provided training on the reforms by DfE.

(61%), followed by having a lack of LA staff resource due to recruitment and retention challenges (50%). Only 15% of LAs reported no barriers.

Figure 4.5 Barriers to offering support experienced by local authorities



Base: B8. All local authorities (n=101).

The vast majority (92%) of LAs who had experienced a barrier were able to overcome it at least partially, with 17% reporting they were able to overcome it completely. The main ways they reported overcoming barriers was through the professionalism and dedication of the LA staff (29%), providing general training (28%), providing accessible training (24%), building relationships with providers (19%), offering support and guidance (13%) and having dedicated contacts for the setting (13%).

Of the seven LAs that were not able to overcome the barriers, four reported that this was due to a lack of staff, four said this was due to a lack of funding, three said the setting was unable to release staff for training and two had other priorities.

Local authorities' perceptions of EY practitioner's training needs

LAs were asked whether they had experienced the training needs of EY practitioners increasing or decreasing following the reforms. The majority (88%) said they thought EY practitioner training needs had increased, with 45% saying they had increased a lot.

Of those who said the training needs of EY practitioners had increased, around nine-in-ten said this was due to the changes to educational programmes and curriculum practices (91%) or the changes to the practitioner assessment approach (88%). Over half said this was due to the removal of local authority moderation on the EYFS profile assessments (58%) or changes to the ELGs (56%).

Of the two LAs that said the training needs of EY practitioners had decreased, both agreed this was due to the changes to the practitioner assessment approach.

Types of support received: qualitative findings

Throughout the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff mentioned a range of different types of support that they received to support with the implementation of the EYFS reforms. This primarily included support from LAs, external training providers, online resources, social media, and other networks.

One of the key forms of support that leaders and staff mentioned was support from their LA. Qualitative research identified that support from LAs most often came in the form of training and guidance through multiple types of advisors, which coincides with the quantitative findings. Examples of these included EY Advisors, Quality Improvement Officers, and School Improvement Officers. The support that these advisors and officers provided included training about the reforms and being available to answer ad hoc queries. For example, one reception leader noted that they attended a whole day's training session which introduced the reforms and covered how different schools were approaching the reforms. Another leader from a group-based setting reported that they had support from an EY Advisor who was consistently on hand to offer support.

[We hear from them] every month or so, just checking to see how the nursery is doing and whether there is anything that we need any help with, so we have that support which is very helpful, and it has helped some of our more newly-qualified staff in [learning] right from wrong, and also about learning about the new EYFS – *Leader, Group-based*

In some cases, leaders and staff also reported that their LA supported them by facilitating networks of EY providers and organising 'cluster meetings' where providers could discuss various topics, including the reforms. This was particularly important for childminders who could feel more isolated due to the nature of their employment.

The Early Years practitioners get lots of opportunities to come together with other schools and talk about good practice from those schools and I think that can be one of the most powerful things because when you're working in a school you can become quite isolated. – *Leader, Reception*

[Update meetings and cluster groups, facilitated by the local authority] were really useful. It's something we don't do enough of. – *Leader, School-based*

Among those who received support from their LA, perceptions of the usefulness of this support were generally positive, as they felt that it helped to inform the changes that needed to be made following the reforms. However, there were some leaders and staff who felt that the support lacked detail, was inconveniently timed, or was too costly. This was particularly the case for childminders who reported less flexibility.

It's expensive, not necessarily in your local area so you're having to travel across the county to get to the training, and it's often at really inappropriate times for people who work in full-time childcare roles. The nature of childcare is that you're often in ratio so you can't just bob out for a couple of hours and do a course. – *Leader, Childminder*

Case study: "...[other staff] are starting to understand how early years is different."

Susan* was an Early Years Lead in a local authority voluntary aided school. One key barrier experienced by Susan was that at her school, the senior leaders did not have a good understanding of how early years is different to the national curriculum. This meant that she needed to spend a lot of her time explaining why certain things could not be implemented, which delayed progress.

However, with support from her local authority school improvement officer, she was able to find a solution for this. Susan spoke to her local authority improvement officer and developed an understanding of how other schools have implemented changes in light of the reforms, and how best she could ensure that the reforms were implemented effectively. Susan was then able to use this information to reassure senior staff that they were taking the correct approach.

**name has been changed for anonymity*

In a minority of cases, leaders and staff felt that their LA was disengaged with their school and was not providing enough support. Some attributed this lack of support to the pandemic, with this being a time when less in person contact within schools was the norm. A handful mentioned that, because their school had a good or outstanding Ofsted rating, they were less likely to receive support compared to those who had an inadequate rating.

Other than support from LAs, providers received support from other professional networks. For example, through local groups of EY providers, or discussing the reforms in online forums or social media groups, for example, Facebook and WhatsApp, or sharing learnings across Multi-Academy Trust networks (MATs).

[The trust] get together every half term for an early year's network where we can discuss concerns and I do find that beneficial – *Staff, Reception*

In general, there was a lot of positivity about all forms of networks as they provided the opportunity to share ideas, share examples of the actions they had taken in response to the reforms, and to keep each other updated on any changes. Accessing these networks and group meetings online was preferred, particularly for those who are under time pressures.

Case Study: "There was some conflict with other staff on best practice."

Jane* is a reception class teacher with 5 years teaching experience. Her school was also an early adopter school. It is part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

Initially, she had difficulties getting the other EYFS teacher on board with the reforms. Her colleague had 20+ years teaching experience and was reluctant to change her teaching practices.

However, as part of a MAT, she was able to get support across the schools with regular meetings and made several visits to schools to see good practice in action. She also had a supportive headteacher, and an EY consultant was employed who provided targeted support in school.

**name has been changed for anonymity*

Online resources and documentation were another form of support received. In the qualitative interviews, a few leaders and staff mentioned reading the government guidance, such as the EYFSP handbook. While most noted the government guidance they received was a helpful resource, some found the detail too long and technical.

Other online resources included EY academics and representative organisations.

[EY author] has a really good grip on what it is we should be doing and how we can make it work practically. [They have] written a lot of books and we follow a lot of what he does in our class. – *Leader, School-based*

To support implementation of the revised EYFS, DfE launched the [Help for Early Years Providers](#) website, which contains links to useful resources that can support planning for your setting. DfE also fund the website [Foundation Years - From pregnancy to children aged 5](#) which contains the latest resources and news on policies that affect the EY. During the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff were

also asked if they were aware of or had used the Foundation Years website and the Help for Early Years Providers platform.

Most leaders and staff had heard of the Foundation Years website, but few had used it. Some said they did not have time, did not think it was necessary, or they had not got around to using it yet. Leaders and staff based in group-based and school-based settings were more likely to report that they found this resource useful. Those that did say it was a useful resource highlighted the alerts and the volume of information.

“I use it a lot, I like it, I like the fact it has everything there – they post any updates and I subscribe to alerts.” - *Leader, Reception*

Others felt that while it contained a lot of information, they did not have enough time to go through it.

“There are things there in writing, but it is not always clear. In theory it is, yes, but in practice not always.” – *Leader, Childminder*

A few leaders and staff interviewed in the qualitative research had heard of the Help for Early Years Platform, but only one had used it¹⁰. Those who had heard of it but had not used it often reported that this was because they found it difficult to navigate on a phone or tablet, and found it harder to navigate than the desktop version.

“You kind of have to jump through a few more hoops to get to where you need to be, and also it’s just not quite as clear-cut as what it is on a desktop.” - *Leader, Group-based*

Suggestions for improving support

Moving on from the support that was received, this section explores views on how support could be improved.

Staff suggestions for improving support received from schools and nurseries

In the staff survey, of the 12 staff¹¹ who received support to implement the reforms but found this support unhelpful, 11 said the support could have been more useful if it had provided more practical guidance on how to implement the changes. 4 said the

¹⁰ Note for context, the Help for Early Years Platform has c.150,000 users.

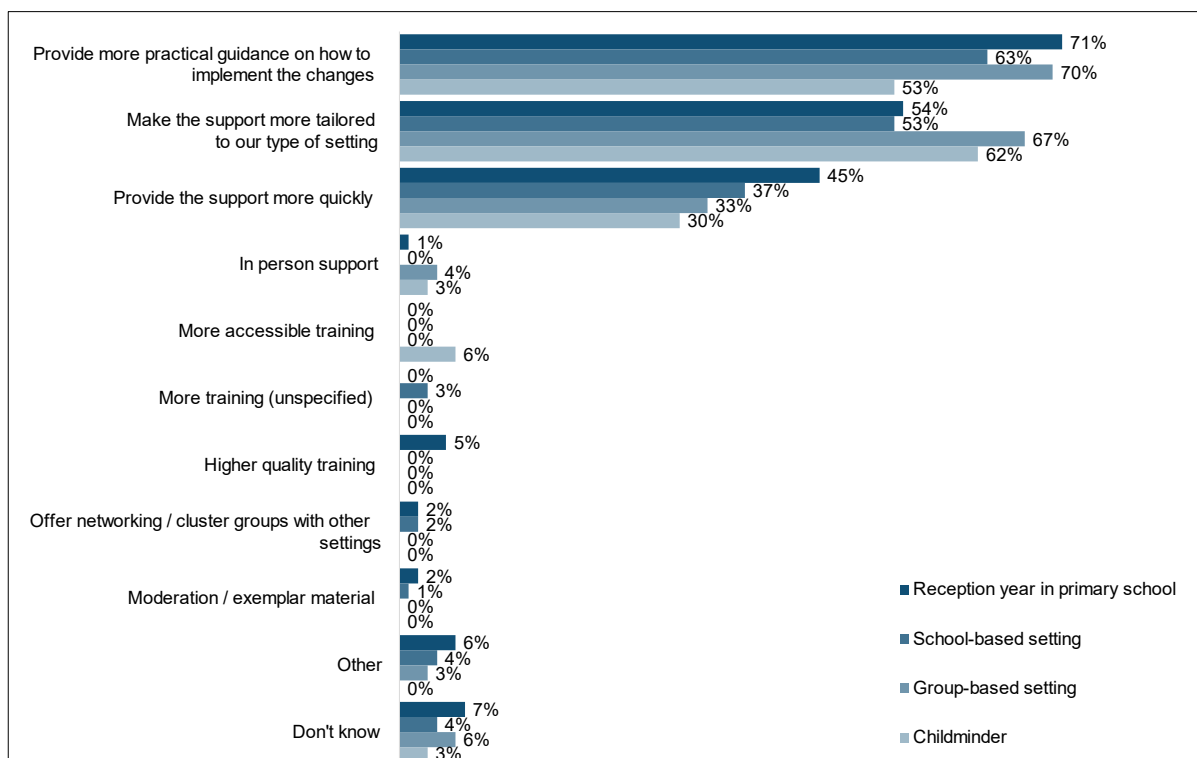
¹¹ Due to low base size in the survey these are reported as figures rather than percentages.

support would have been more useful if it had been provided more quickly and four felt it would have been more useful if it was tailored to their setting.

Leaders' suggestions for improving support from local authorities

Leaders who reported that the support they received from their LA was not useful, were asked how it could have been improved. Reception, group-based and school-based leaders were most likely to say it could have provided more practical guidance on how to implement the changes (71%, 70% and 63% respectively). Figure 4.6 shows that group-based settings were particularly likely to report that the support could have been more tailored to their setting type (67%).

Figure 4.6 How local authority support could have been made more useful to leaders

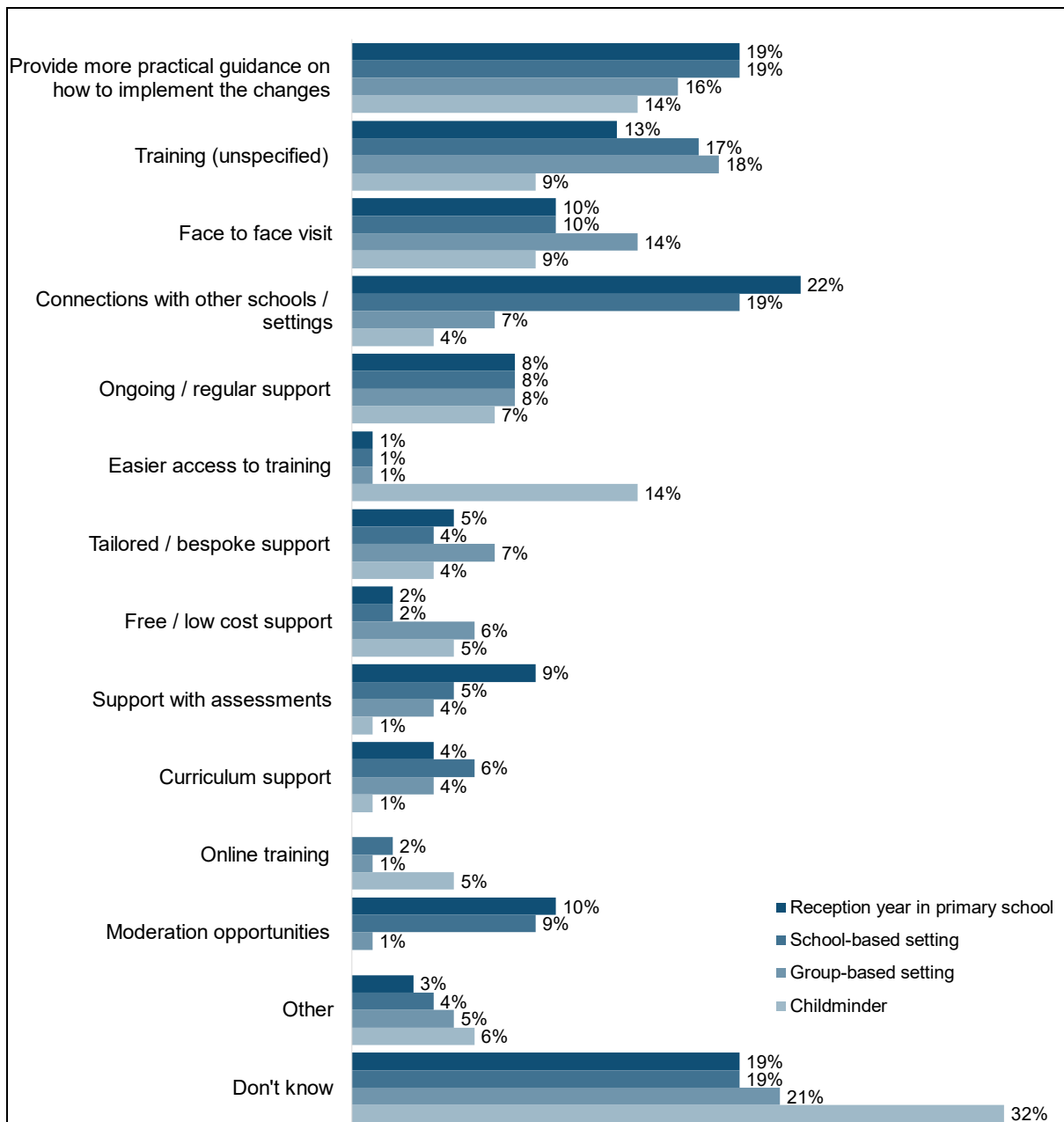


Base: D4 (L). How could this support have been more useful? All respondents who felt local authority support was not useful. Reception (n=50); School-based setting (n=76); Group-based setting (n=44); Childminder (n=28)

Leaders were also asked whether further support from their LA with regards to the 2021 EYFS reforms would be useful. Reception leaders (46%) and school-based leaders (52%) were more likely than group-based leaders (39%) and childminders (37%) to report that they do not think further support from their local authority would be useful. Group-based leaders were the most likely to say they would benefit from further support (42%) while around a third of childminders (36%), reception leaders (35%) and school-based leaders (33%) said they could benefit from it.

Those who said they could benefit from further support were asked what type of support they would find useful. As shown by Figure 4.7, responses were quite varied, and a relatively high proportion said they did not know what further support they would find useful (32% of childminders, 21% of group-based leaders, 19% of school-based leaders, and 19% of reception leaders). Reception and school-based leaders were also most likely to say that they could benefit from more practical guidance on how to implement the changes (19% and 19% respectively) and connections with other schools or settings (22% and 19% respectively). Group-based leaders were most likely to say they could benefit from training (18%) and childminders were most likely to say they could benefit from easier access to training (14%) or more practical guidance on how to implement the changes (14%).

Figure 4.7 Types of further support from local authorities that leaders would find useful



Base: D6. What types of further support from your local authority would you find useful in regard to the 2021 EYFS reforms? All respondents who feel them or their setting would benefit from (further) support from their local authority re the EYFS reforms. Reception (n=322); School-based setting (n=366); Group-based setting (n=253); Childminder (n=299).

LAs were asked what support, if any, they thought EY staff and leaders would have benefitted from receiving from them. Similarly to leaders, around a fifth (21%) of LAs felt more in depth or specific training would have been beneficial.

Improvements to support: qualitative findings

During the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff were also asked what further support they felt they needed and how existing support could be improved. In general, providers were positive about the support they got, however, the majority noted that they could always benefit from further support when it comes to knowing how best to continue implementing the reforms. Understandably, this was a more pertinent need for those who felt they received limited good quality support from either their LA or other sources. Suggestions for improvements and additional support included the following:

- **Best practice examples** – across all settings, leaders and staff expressed a need for examples of how the reforms should be implemented, paired with real life examples. It was also suggested that this should cover ‘do’s and don’ts’ and checklists for implementation. There was also a desire for these examples to cover the breadth of setting and pupil types to ensure that all bases were covered.

Having a best practice training course would have been helpful, with real life examples of how the reforms will work in practice and what it will mean for them. - *Leader, Reception*

If I had the opportunity to go to an early adopter school and see how they had embedded it into their curriculum, that would have been really helpful. – *Staff, Reception*

- **More training and guidance** – in general, providers would like to see more training and guidance, particularly in terms of why the reforms have been rolled out to provide context, and, how providers should go about building the curriculum. Providers wanted multiple clear examples of the type of things they should be doing to help guide them. In addition, leaders and staff felt that more extensive training and guidance is needed for those who are new to education, or do not have a background in education.

I think it would be really nice to have some support from DfE or whoever around, you know, building a curriculum and what that might entail, what it should, what it could look like, or should look like... they don't often tell us what to do but they'll tell us when we're wrong. – *Staff, Group-based*

- **More extensive networks and peer support groups facilitated by local authorities** - all setting types reported that they would benefit from more

networks that would help them to connect with other providers and learn from what they are doing. This was particularly important for childminders who feel more isolated in their role.

You don't have 100% confidence when you are reading through [guidance on the reforms]. I sometimes find it easier to have a professional discussion not just one on one, but sometimes in a group as well – *Leader, Childminder*

- **Support for teaching children with SEND** – providers commonly expressed a need for more support when it comes to teaching children with SEND and making the reforms more suitable for this group of children. More detail on this can be found in [Section 5](#).
- **More convenient training** – leaders and staff noted that they would want to see more training that was online, low cost and took place at convenient times, for example, outside of school hours.
- **Support to recruit more staff** – as discussed, high staff turnover was one of the key barriers to implementation. Improved support and financial resource to hire more staff or support staff to return to the sector would be beneficial to those that are understaffed.
- **Accessible training** – in a small number of cases, leaders and staff noted that they would like to see the guidance be more accessible to those with disabilities, and be jargon-free.

[There are] no resources for deaf people...language is too academic. – *Leader, Childminder*

5. Effect of the EYFS 2021 reforms and future considerations

This chapter explores the effect that the EYFS reforms have had on EY staff, and the perceived effects on children (as reported by leaders and staff). It also looks at LA perceptions of the reforms and any future considerations for the reforms. When discussing effects, it should be noted that these are self-reported based on the survey and qualitative depth interviews and not based on an impact evaluation.

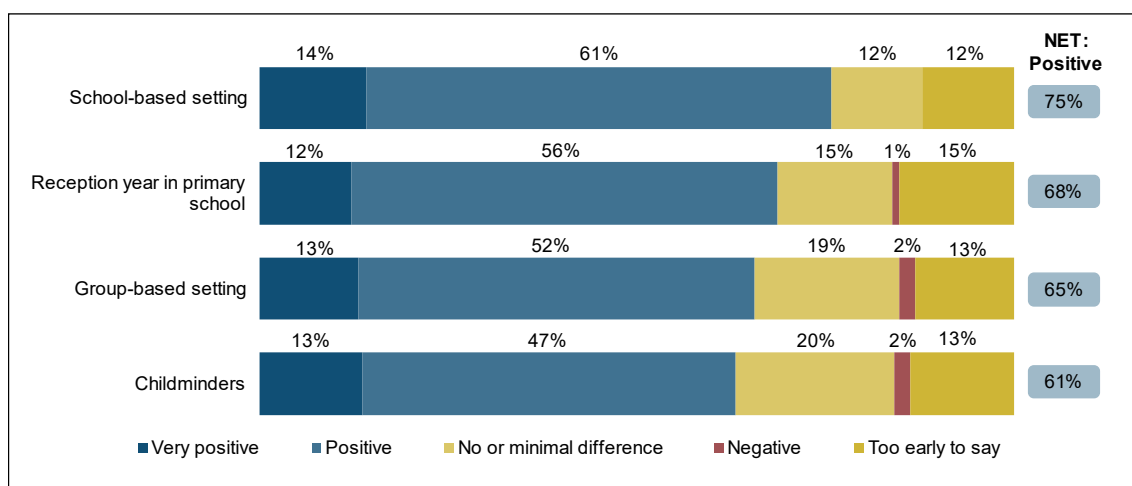
Summary of findings:

- The majority of leaders from all settings, and staff, reported that the reforms had or will have a positive impact on children's learning and development. Just over one-third of leaders from reception and school-based settings thought that the reforms were likely to have a positive impact on children's transition from Reception to Year 1, with a similar proportion who thought it was too early to tell.
- Among staff and leaders who said that the reforms would have a positive impact, the main improvements they have seen or would expect to see included children having better quality interactions with staff and improved communication and language. Changes to practitioner assessment approach was the main element of the reforms that most leaders felt led to these positive improvements.
- Among those who said there were groups who would be negatively affected, the most common mentioned were children who needed help with personal, social and emotional development, and children with poor literacy, communication or numeracy skills.
- In the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff noted several groups that they thought could be negatively impacted by the reforms, this included: children with SEND, children with English as an additional language (EAL), children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and children in reception who had not previously been to nursery.
- The majority of leaders and staff did not face workload issues following the reforms.
- The majority felt there were no gaps in the assessment requirements and learning and development requirements. Of those who reported gaps, these were more likely to be leaders.
- In the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff made suggestions for improvements to the reforms. These improvements included more support for children's transition into Year 1 and reworking the ELGs.

Overall effect of the EYFS reforms on children

The majority of leaders thought the reforms have had or will have a positive effect on children’s learning and development. As shown by Figure 5.1, leaders in school-based settings were more likely to say the reforms will have a positive impact (75%), compared to leaders from reception (68%), group-based settings (65%) and childminders (61%).

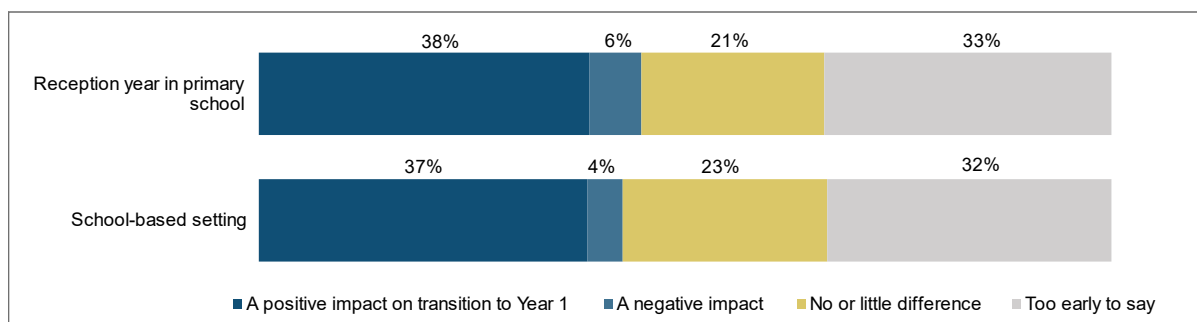
Figure 5.1 Whether leaders think the reforms have had or will have a positive impact on children’s learning and development



Base: C1. All leaders. Reception (n=923); School-based (n=1,112); Group-based (n=634); Childminder (n=827).

When thinking about the effect of the reforms, leaders who work in a school setting most commonly thought the reforms were likely to have a positive impact on children’s transition from Reception to Year 1 and the rest of Key Stage 1. As shown by Figure 5.2, just over a third of Reception year leaders (38%) and school-based leaders (37%) thought they would have a positive impact, with a further third saying it was too early to say (33% of reception year leaders and 32% of school-based leaders).

Figure 5.2 The impact leaders who work in a school setting think the reforms will have on children’s transition from Reception to Year 1



Base: C8. All leaders in school-based setting. Reception leaders (n=914); School-based leaders (n=1,008)

Staff were also asked what impact they think the reforms will have on children’s learning and development. Seven-in-ten (69%) staff agreed that the reforms would have a positive impact while one-in-ten (11%) thought it was too early to say.

In addition, just under a third (31%) of staff thought the reforms were likely to have a positive impact on children’s transition from Reception to Year 1 and the rest of Key Stage 1, or that it was too early to say (28%). Staff working in the most deprived areas¹² were more likely than others to say the reforms would make no or little difference (52% vs. 26% of all staff).

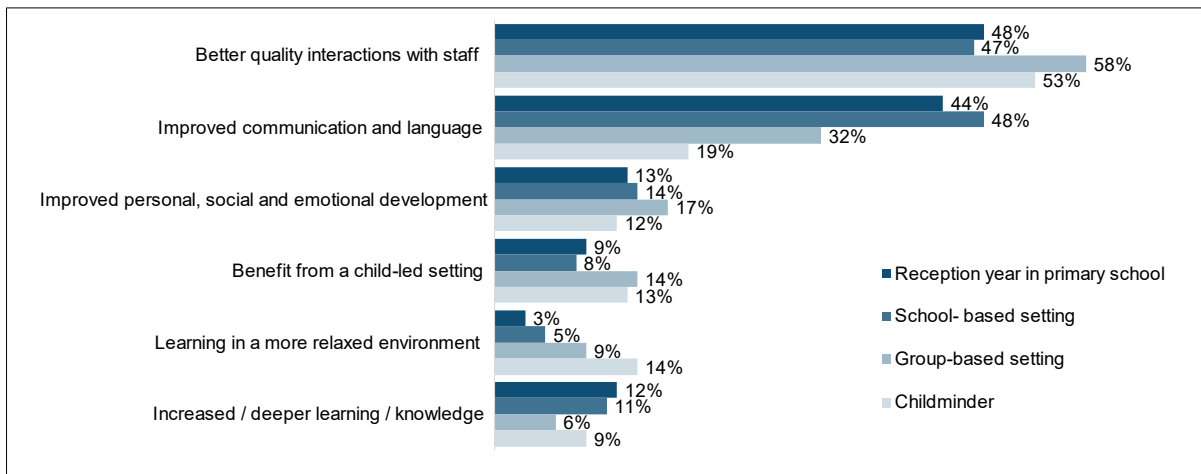
LAs were also asked what impact they think the reforms will have on children’s learning and development. Most LAs thought the reforms were likely to have a positive impact (44%) or that it was too early to say (36%).

Reported positive effects on children

Leaders who felt the reforms were having, or would have, a positive effect were asked what impacts they had seen or expected to see. Figure 5.3 shows that a sizeable proportion of leaders reported that the reforms were leading to children having better quality interactions with staff (58% of group-based leaders, 53% of childminders, 48% of reception year leaders and 47% of school-based leaders). This was followed by improved communication and language, which was more likely to be mentioned by school-based leaders (48%) and reception year leaders (44%), compared to group-based leaders (32%) and childminders (19%).

¹² Ranked in the 1st quintile on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

Figure 5.3 The main improvements for children that leaders have seen, or expect to see, following the reforms



Base: C2. All leaders who feel the reforms have/will have positive impact (excluding don't know). Reception (n=540); School-based (n=737); Group-based (n=334); Childminder (n=324).

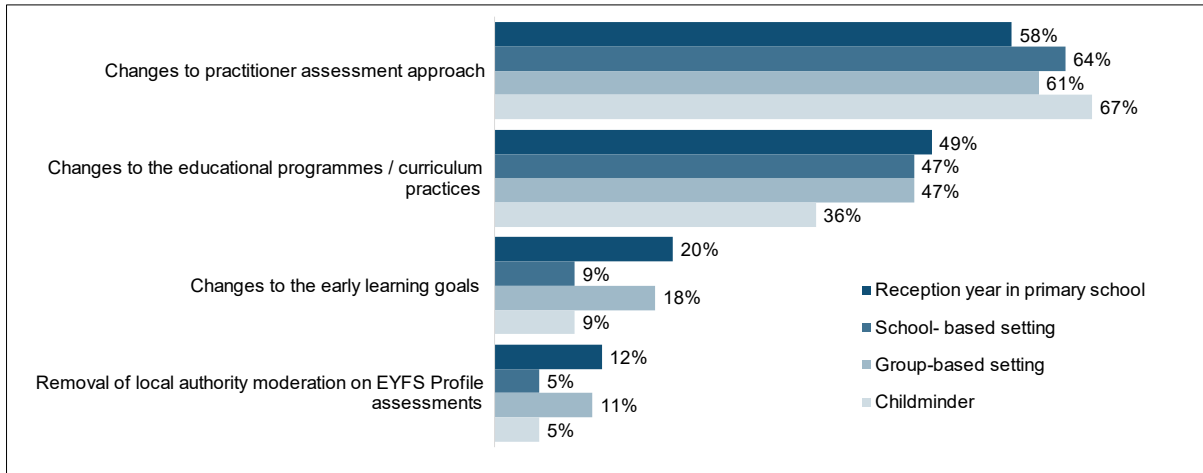
As shown by Figure 5.4, when asked which elements of the reforms led to these improvements, leaders considered that the changes to the practitioner assessment approach had the biggest impact (67% of childminders, 64% of school-based leaders, 61% of group-based leaders and 58% of reception year leaders).

Group-based leaders in the most deprived areas¹³ were more likely than group-based leaders in less deprived areas to report improvements to communication and language following the reforms (40% compared to 27% of other group-based leaders). Leaders from reception settings in the most deprived areas also reported increased improvements of learning/knowledge than reception leaders in less deprived areas (21% compared to 12% of other reception leaders).

Childminders were less likely than other providers to say that the improvements were due to changes to the educational programmes and curriculum practices (36% vs. 49% of reception year, 47% of school-based and 47% group-based leaders).

¹³ Ibid

Figure 5.4 The main elements of the reforms that leaders feel have led to improvements



Base: C2A. All leaders who feel the reforms have had or will have positive impact (excluding don't know). Reception (n=506); School-based (n=694); Group-based (n=305); Childminder (n=287). Main responses shown.

Staff were also asked their views on which elements of the reforms led to improvements for children. Staff were most likely to say that the reforms were leading to better quality interactions with staff (38%) and improved communication and language (32%). Staff who felt the reforms had had a positive impact were most likely to say that the improvements were due to the changes to the practitioner assessment approach (43%) and changes to the education programme and curriculum practices (31%).

LA leaders were most likely to say that the reforms were leading to better quality interactions with staff (41%) and that children were benefiting from a child-led setting (39%). The majority of LAs who felt the reforms had a positive impact agreed that this was due to the changes to the education programmes and curriculum practices (68%), followed by changes to the practitioner assessment approach (41%) and other improvements (30%). It is important to note that LA leaders are quite far removed from learning settings.

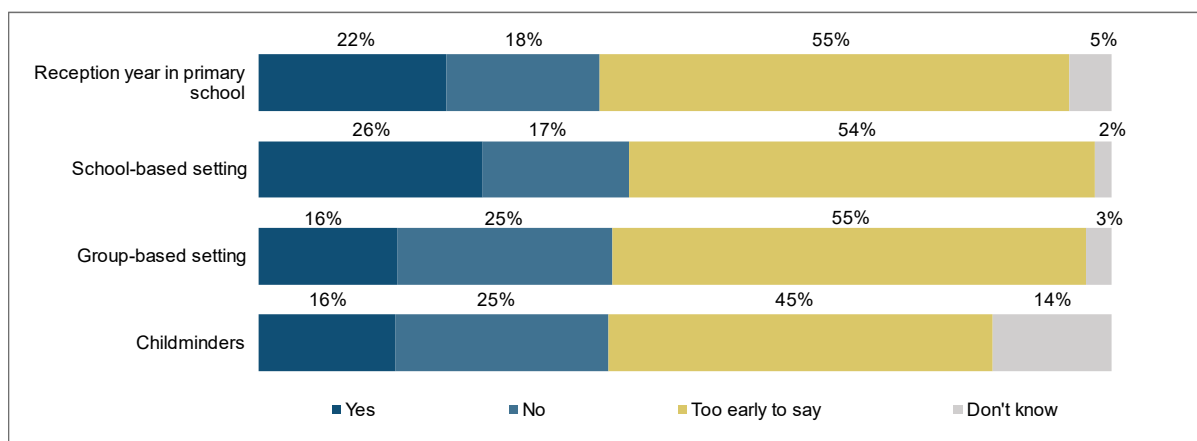
More detail from the qualitative interviews with regards to the changes made as a result of the reforms and the perceived benefits they have had on children can be found in [Section 2](#).

Reported positive effects on particular groups of children

Among leaders who could comment on whether the reforms had had an impact, around a quarter of school-based leaders (26%) reported that the reforms were benefitting specific groups of children followed by 22% of reception leaders, 16% of group-based leaders and 16% of childminders. As shown by Figure 5.5, the majority

of group-based leaders (55%), reception leaders (55%) and school-based leaders (54%) felt it was too early to say with just under half (45%) of childminders also agreeing it was too early to say.

Figure 5.5 Whether leaders felt particular groups of children benefitted from the reforms



Base: C4. All leaders who feel the reforms have had positive, negative or no impact. Reception (n=780); School-based setting (n=977); Group-based setting (n=544); Childminder (n=691).

A quarter (25%) of staff who felt the reforms had had some impact already thought that this impact had benefitted particular groups of children. As with leaders, again around a half (52%) thought it was too early to say, and around a fifth (17%) felt it had not impacted particular groups.

Of those leaders and staff who thought the reforms had benefitted particular groups of children, the most common mentions were:

- Children who needed help with personal, social and emotional development (71% of group-based leaders, 70% of school-based leaders, 68% of childminders, 66% of reception leaders and 69% of staff).
- Children with poor literacy, communication or numeracy skills (78% of school-based leaders, 77% of reception leaders, 69% of group-based leaders, 61% of childminders and 67% of staff).
- Children from poorer economic backgrounds (58% of school-based leaders, 50% of group-based leaders, 47% of reception leaders, 41% of childminders and 50% of staff).
- Children with English as a second language (53% of group-based leaders, 50% of school-based leaders, 47% of reception leaders, 43% of childminders and 57% of staff).

- Children with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) (51% of group-based leaders, 46% of school-based leaders, 45% of reception leaders, 35% of childminders and 54% of staff).

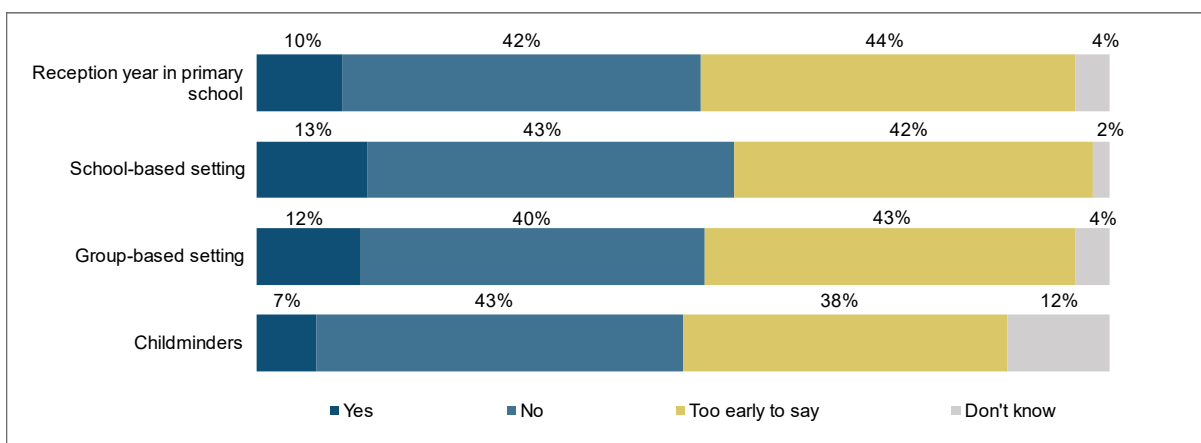
Reported no effect or negative effects on children

Those who felt the reforms had no impact or a negative impact on children were most likely to say this was because the reforms did not offer anything new. Around one-in-ten leaders said this (10% of childminders, 9% group-based leaders, 8% of reception leaders and 8% of school-based leaders) and one-in-twenty staff (5%) and LAs (5%).

Perceived no or negative effects on particular groups of children

Of leaders who could comment on whether the reforms had had an impact, around one-in-ten school-based leaders (13%), group-based leaders (12%) and reception leaders (10%) felt that the reforms had negatively affected particular groups of children. Childminders were less likely than other leaders to say this (7%) and were more likely to say they didn't know whether any groups of children had been negatively impacted. There were similar proportions of leaders in each setting who said it had not negatively impacted particular groups, compared to those that said it was too early to say (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 Whether leaders felt particular groups of children have been negatively affected by the reforms



Base: C5. All leaders who feel the reforms have had positive, negative or no impact. Reception (n=780); School-based setting (n=977); Group-based setting (n=544); Childminder (n=691).

Of the leaders who thought that particular groups of children had been negatively affected by the reforms, most were unable to say which groups had been negatively affected (46% of school-based leaders, 46% of childminders and 40% of reception leaders). The most common group of children identified as being negatively affected

by the reforms were those with additional needs, with 7% of group-based leaders, 4% of school-based leaders, 3% of reception leaders and 2% of childminders agreeing they had been negatively affected.

Group-based leaders in the most deprived areas were more likely to report that boys were negatively impacted by the reforms, when compared to less deprived areas (29% compared to 19% of group-based leaders overall).

Just over one-in-ten (13%) staff who felt the reforms had already had some impact thought that this impact had negatively affected particular groups of children. Around two-fifths thought that it had not impacted particular groups negatively (42%) or that it was too early to say (40%).

In the qualitative interviews, leaders and staff were also asked specifically whether they thought any particular groups of children had been or would be negatively affected by the EYFS reforms. Whilst, in general, leaders and staff were positive about the reforms and felt that the curriculum was now more child focused, there were concerns raised around some groups of children being negatively affected by the reforms. This included children with SEND, children with EAL, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and children in reception who had not previously been to nursery. The main concern highlighted was that these children were typically those who were less advanced compared to their peers in terms of their development. Among leaders and staff who felt that children with SEND could be negatively impacted by the reforms, this was because they have found it difficult to plot the progression of children with SEND (and other children with disadvantages) against the new framework, as it was too broad.

There's no way you can use the new framework to plot a SEND child's progress. They are working with the same curriculum, but a completely different framework, we made our own ... DfE one uses very broad banding ... but it's still so disheartening for neuro-diverse child for example to not be meeting any of the age points. - *Leader, Childminder*

Among children with EAL, leaders and staff mentioned that they can struggle to communicate with staff and other children, which can affect their language and speech development, and that the curriculum does not allow enough time for them to progress. Some leaders and staff noted that the same applied to children who had not been to nursery.

[Children that have been to nursery] are used to the routine, the day-to-day things, adults trying to get learning from them. Whilst children that haven't been to nursery or have SEND issues or are EAL, they need to play catch-up so they can learn all of the different bits and pieces. – *Leader, Reception*

Similarly, for disadvantaged children, it was noted that they also needed additional support, particularly in situations where this support was not available at home.

It is up to my staff to catch them up quickly, but the changes in the EYFS are there for the average child, the bright child. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds will approach the curriculum more slowly as they haven't got the foundation. –*Leader, Group-based*

In addition, a minority mentioned that children who were developing and progressing better than expected were not mentioned in the reforms. It was suggested that the needs of these 'gifted and talented children' should be balanced alongside the needs of those less developed.

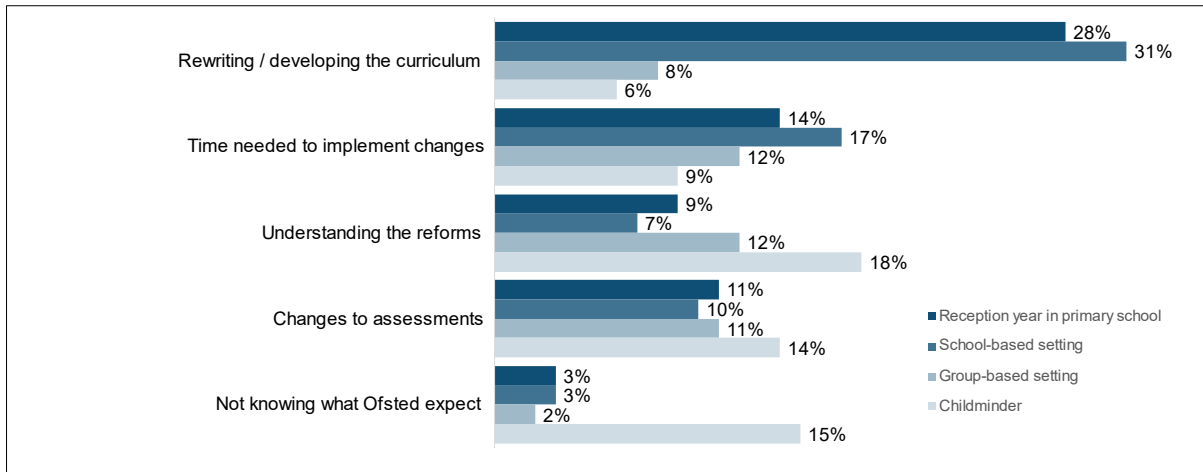
The reforms have separated children into two categories - you've either got it or you haven't. There's no merit for going above or beyond, or for not quite meeting a milestone. - *Staff, School-based*

The effect of the EYFS reforms on staff

While the majority of leaders did not report facing workload challenges following the EYFS reforms, some did report this as an issue. This was less the case with childminders (only 8% reported that they had had workload challenges) but rose to almost three-in-ten school-based leaders (29%), group-based leaders (28%) and reception year leaders (27%).

As shown by Figure 5.7, the challenges leaders experienced varied by setting. The most commonly mentioned challenge faced by reception year leaders (28%) and school-based leaders (31%) was rewriting and developing the curriculum as a result of the EYFS reforms, followed by the time required to implement the changes (14% and 17% respectively). For group-based providers, the challenges most commonly mentioned included the time needed to implement changes (12%), understanding the reforms (12%) and changes to assessments (11%), and for childminders it was understanding the reforms (18%).

Figure 5.7 Workload challenges leaders faced as a result of the reformed EYFS



Base: B4. All leaders who said they faced new challenges as a result of the reforms. Reception (n=248); School-based (n=325); Group-based (n=173); Childminder (n=71). Responses with less than 10% for at least one provider type not included. This question was open ended and some responses have not been charted as they were not issues caused as a result of the EYFS reforms including understaffing/recruitment issues (Reception (3%); School-based (6%); Group-based (21%); Childminder (0%)) and an increase in pupils with SEND (Reception (6%); School-based (6%); Group-based (17%); Childminder (3%)).

Similarly to leaders, one-in-five (21%) staff reported facing workload challenges as a result of the EYFS reforms. Staff who reported facing workload challenges were most likely to report that this included rewriting and developing the curriculum as a result of the EYFS reforms (18%), changes to assessments (13%) and other staff or SLT not understanding the changes (13%).

On a positive note, in the qualitative interviews leaders and staff did note numerous ways that the reforms had had a positive impact on themselves. The main benefits mentioned included having a reduced workload, and the resulting decrease in stress; their ability to spend more time with children, and do their job more effectively; their ability to spend more time researching teaching methods or upskilling members of staff; and an improved work-life balance.

There is more time for the team to research things pedagogically together - what does that mean for us and this cohort of children? We've really enjoyed that, and we really think quite deeply. - *Staff, School-based*

I feel we now have embedded the practice fully and I feel I have the best work/life balance I've had since I've been teaching. I'm less stressed because I understand what the expectations are. – *Staff, School-based*

In addition to this, some leaders and staff mentioned that since the changes to EYFS, they have felt empowered and trusted to carry out their role effectively.

We are more confident in what we're saying now. Before we'd say 'let me just check the framework'... now we've been told we're knowledgeable about children... my voice actually matters about what's important for children. -

Staff, Group-based

Although leaders and staff were broadly positive, some did note that the reforms had had a negative impact on themselves, and actually resulted in them feeling more stressed. This was often because they were balancing the need to implement the reforms whilst also trying to deal with the impacts of the pandemic on their children. The pandemic had also exacerbated staffing issues, with some settings struggling with staff off sick and with the need to recruit and retain staff. Please note, these issues may have been attributed to the reforms, but the effects could be attributed more broadly to the impacts of the pandemic.

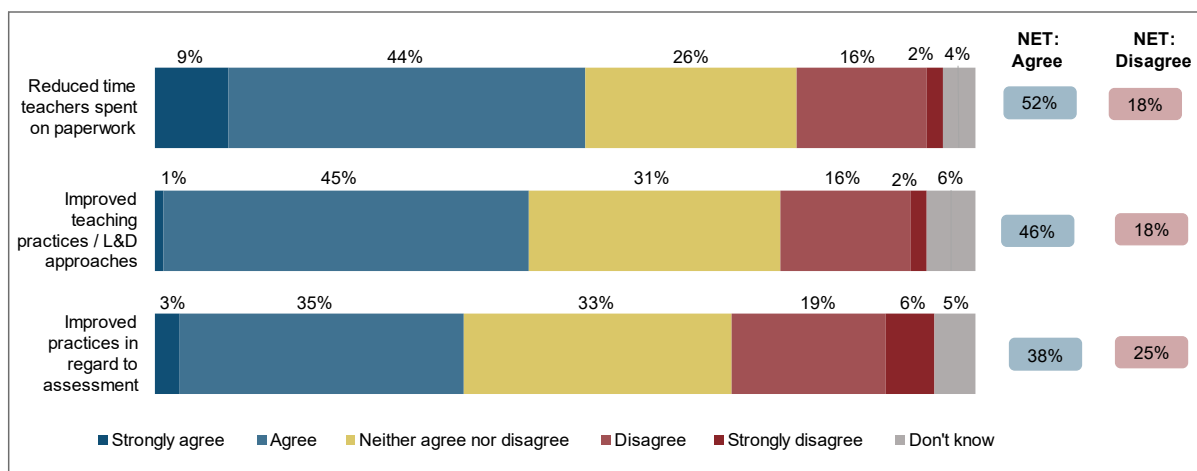
Furthermore, making sure that they had covered everything in their implementation of the reforms was also causing more stress. Some settings felt the reforms were too open to interpretation, and some participants thought it was difficult to know whether they had covered everything and whether this would meet Ofsted's requirements.

The main impact is the stress and anxiety around making sure that everything is covered or that the right things have been implemented. – *Leader, Group-based*

Local authorities' perceptions of the reforms

LAs were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the reforms had led to a reduction in time teachers spent on paperwork, improved teaching practices or improved assessment practices. As shown by Figure 5.8, LAs were most likely to agree that the reforms led to a reduction in the time teachers spent on paperwork (52% agreed). This was followed by agreeing that the reforms had improved teaching practices (46%) and improved assessment practices (38%). For each of these outcomes, there was some LAs who disagreed (18%, 18% and 25% respectively).

Figure 5.8 Whether local authorities agreed that the reforms led to a range of outcomes



Base: D1. All local authorities (n=101).

Those who agreed with each outcome were asked how they felt the reforms had influenced this. Those who agreed that the reforms had led to a reduction in time teachers spent on paperwork were most likely to say that this was achieved as a result of fewer formal observations (55%) and that it allowed teachers more time with children (25%).

Half (50%) of the LAs who thought the reforms had improved teaching practices thought it had done so by increasing contact with children. Around a quarter thought it had improved teaching practices by providing a focus on child development (28%) and a focus on curriculum content and development (26%).

Around a third of the LAs that thought the reforms had improved assessment practices considered this had been achieved by reducing workloads (34%), allowing more time to focus on children (34%) and streamlining assessments (32%).

Those who did not agree with each statement were asked why they felt the reforms had not led to this outcome. Half (50%) of the LAs who did not agree that the reforms had reduced teachers' time spent on paperwork, said this was due to pressure from the senior leadership team (SLT). One-fifth (22%) said this was due to perceived expectations from Ofsted.

LAs who felt the reforms had not improved teaching practices highlighted a lack of staff knowledge of child development (33%), pressure from the SLT (28%) and a lack of clarity in the guidance (22%). One-fifth (22%) felt it was too early to tell whether teaching practices had been improved.

LAs who did not agree that the reforms had improved assessment practices cited practitioners being unclear where children should be in terms of their development

(40%), the guidance lacking clarity (32%) and some schools and Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) still expecting children to be tracked (24%).

LAs were also asked if they thought the reforms had resulted in other significant improvements to practices. A quarter (25%) agreed that they had and those that agreed were most likely to say the reforms had resulted in freedom and flexibility within the curriculum (32%), a focus on communication and language (24%) and a greater understanding of child development (16%). Of those who did not agree that the reforms had resulted in other significant improvements, half (52%) thought this was because settings had other priorities to focus on. A smaller proportion said this was due to it taking time to embed changes (19%) and that it was too early to see the impact (14%). A similar proportion felt that settings have just worked the reforms into existing practices (14%).

Gaps and future considerations

Leaders were asked whether there were any gaps or unresolved issues within the various requirements of the reforms. The majority did not flag any particular issues. However, among the few who did, these leaders were most likely to say there were no gaps in each of the requirements including:

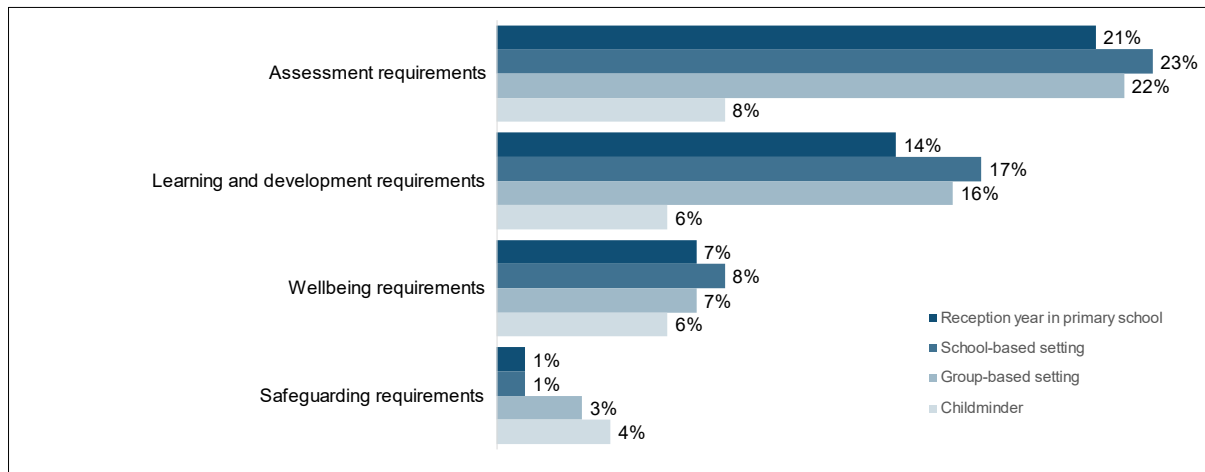
- The safeguarding requirements (88% of school-based leaders, 77% of group-based leaders, 87% of reception year leaders and 69% of childminders).
- The well-being requirements (72% of school-based leaders, 67% of group-based leaders, 70% of reception year leaders and 62% of childminders).
- The learning & development requirements (47% of school-based leaders, 42% of group-based leaders, 45% of reception year leaders and 41% of childminders).
- The assessment requirements (48% of school-based leaders, 40% of group-based leaders, 47% of reception year leaders and 42% of childminders).

A minority of leaders identified gaps (as shown in Figure 5.9), most commonly in the assessment requirements (23% of school-based leaders, 22% of group-based leaders, 21% of reception year leaders, although the level dropped to 8% of childminders). This was followed by gaps or unresolved issues regarding learning and development requirements (17% of school-based leaders, 16% of group-based leaders, 14% of reception year leaders, and 6% of childminders). In the qualitative interviews, this was also mentioned by leaders and staff who highlighted that certain topic areas were taken out of the curriculum, leaving a gap.

There are loads of gaps and [DfE] took certain things, like technology, out and they really shouldn't have. – *Leader, Childminder*

Leaders were least likely to report that there were gaps or unresolved issues in the safeguarding requirements (4% of childminders, 3% of group-based leaders, 1% of school-based leaders and 1% of reception leaders).

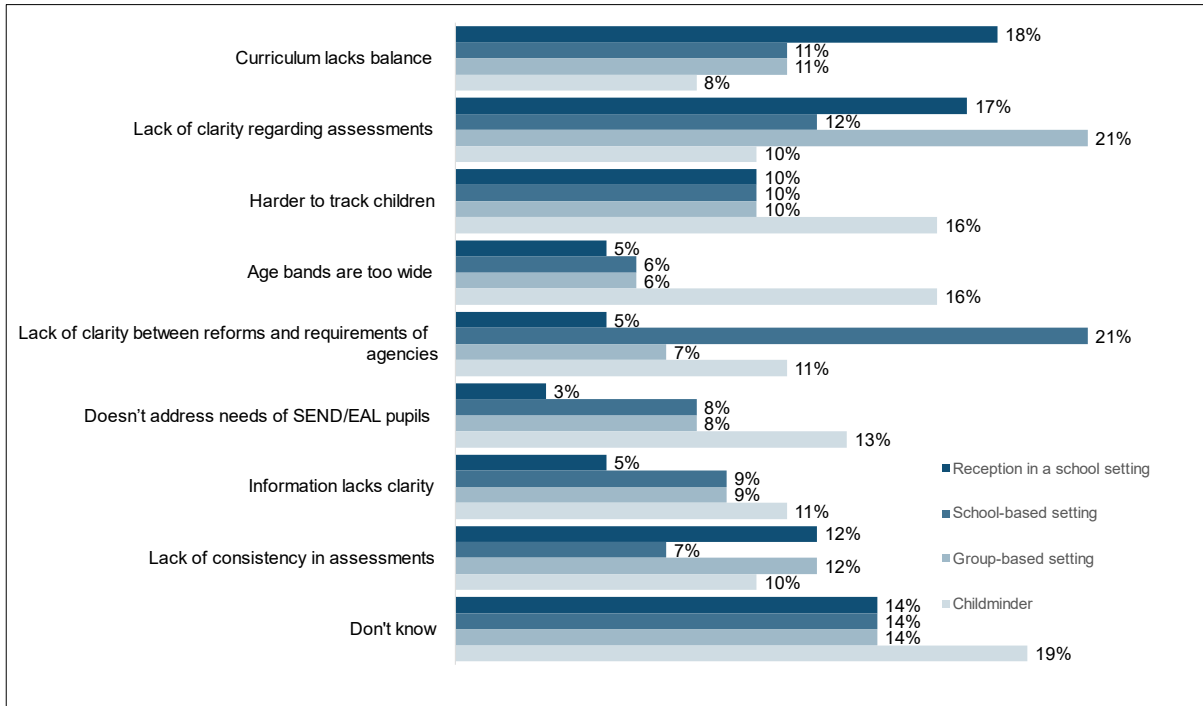
Figure 5.9 Areas in which leaders felt there were gaps or unresolved issues in the reform requirements



Base: A11. All leaders. Reception (n=921); School-based (n=1,104); Group-based (n=628); Childminder (n=817)

Leaders who thought there were any gaps or unresolved issues with the reform requirements were asked to describe the gaps that existed. As shown by Figure 5.10, there were some differences of views. The most common response for reception leaders was the curriculum lacked balance (18%) and there was a lack of clarity regarding assessments (17%). This lack of clarity regarding assessments was also a top answer for school-based settings (21%). Group-based settings were most likely to mention that the age bands were too wide (16%) or that it was harder to track children (16%). Finally, childminders were most likely to say that the issues were the curriculum lacked balance (12%) and it was harder to track children (12%). Of note, childminders were more likely to answer don't know to this question (39%, compared to 14% for reception settings, 14% for school-based settings and 19% for group-based settings).

Figure 5.10 Leaders' perceptions of the gaps and unresolved issues in the reform requirements



Base: A12. Leaders who feel there were gaps or unresolved issues with the reform requirements. Reception (n=282); School-based (n=377); Group-based (n=190); Childminder (n=110). Responses with less than 10% for at least one provider type not included.

Staff were also asked what gaps there were in the reforms. They were most likely to say that gaps in the reforms existed around the assessment requirements (22%), followed by the learning and development requirements (18%), the well-being requirements (10%). Only 2% agreed there were any gaps in the safeguarding requirements.

In the qualitative interviews, one of the main future considerations that reception leaders and staff identified was the importance for the EY curriculum to align more with the Year 1 curriculum. Leaders and staff highlighted that it was possible for some children to enter Year 1 having not made the required progress in Reception, due to the rigidity of the National Curriculum compared to the flexible EY curriculum. Some noted that they would like to see these children continue to work alongside the EYFS framework on a transitional basis, as they move into Year 1. For example, if they have not met their PSED goals in Reception, then staff should feel comfortable addressing this in Year 1 and Year 2. Participants hoped that this would support an improved transition between the two stages.

There's still a struggle between marrying up the early years curriculum and the National Curriculum when you get to Year 1 and teachers really struggle with that and that's the area that needs to be developed. – *Leader, Reception*

Some reported that the ELGs are open to interpretation and not aligned with the National Curriculum means that, sometimes, children are not ready to progress to Year 1.

[ELGs don't] marry with the National Curriculum at all, and you do find that if the children don't meet their Early Learning Goals in Reception, they are still expected to start the National Curriculum and that's where the big gaps begin.
- *Leader, Reception*

Additionally, there were leaders and staff who felt that the ELGs needed to be reworked so that they are not as specific as they currently are. This was proving to be particularly challenging for SEND children, who were consistently not making the required progress when examined against the ELGs, as it does not cater to their needs. A few participants reported that it was disheartening for parents of children with SEND to see that their children were not deemed to be on-track with ELGs.

I have problem with the concept of early learning goals ... it sets them up to fail ... the wording is all wrong. Some children may be amazing at art or writing, but their maths or their balance isn't very good ... children should just be based on where we expect them to be. - *Leader, Group-based*

With regards to taking a broader approach to assessments, some participants pointed out that this also did not work particularly well for children with SEND as it was important to keep track of incremental improvements as they could indicate a trajectory of progress. This approach also makes it easier to identify specific areas of concern. For example, one participant said that they preferred the previous version of Development Matters as it was broken down into smaller steps, compared to the new version of Development Matters which works on the banding of 0-3.

Some of the things that were taken out [as part of the EYFS reforms] were things that I would have used in the past to support those children, some of the ways of looking at communication like Listening and Attention - it used to be separate but now it's got merged as one...it's harder to distinguish what the issue is. - *Leader, Group-based*

A few participants said that moving forward they would like to see a standardised approach across the EY sector regarding the 2-year assessment of children. Making sure this assessment was completed equally across all settings and that all the necessary agencies had access to this documentation was an important factor for some settings, especially those working with children with SEND. Instead, some mentioned that they would have preferred a more detailed framework to refer to when making their assessments of SEND children as these assessments were often needed for purposes, such as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

It would be nice if there was standard pro forma across the sector. The mandatory 2-year checks for example, there is no standard way [of conducting these]. This means from setting to setting, the outputs will vary in terms of tone, depth and interest. - *Leader, Childminders*

It was also suggested by some participants that in the future, the expectations for maths and writing should be reduced as too much was being expected of the children. This was particularly important considering the reported increase in children suffering developmental issues from the effects of the pandemic. With maths, a few participants raised specific issues, including that the curriculum seemed too number heavy and that it encouraged learning by rote (memorisation) which meant that children had a lack of understanding.

They go from mark making or not, to jumping to reception where they are expected to write words and sentences ... some schools take [guidance] to mean children have to be able to write their own name by the end of nursery, some that they only need to be able to give meaning to marks on a page. – *Staff, School-based*

Finally, some participants mentioned looking at staff ratios and said the number of staff working within the EY sector would need to be addressed. This would allow staff to continue working with the reforms and make sure that they were being implemented properly. They felt it was important to have more staff in settings, especially when considering children were coming in with more developmental needs following the pandemic.

I wonder if [ratios need reviewing where they are based on qualification level], as sometimes it doesn't feel like there are enough staff in school settings. We are perfectly in ratio... but it feels like there are so many children and their needs are so high...I'm talking about health and safety as well. – *Leader, Group-based*

One participant mentioned that it might be possible to use the EYFS as a marketing tool when recruiting new staff to the sector, or encouraging staff back to the sector, highlighting the positive impacts of the reforms, including reduced assessment paperwork and the ability to spend more time with children.

We are losing good quality staff...that's our biggest tool...it's the quality of staff and the staff you have that provide that for the children...if you can't get the right staff because of pay...that will impact. - *Leader, School-based*

Conclusions

The statutory EYFS reforms were rolled out to all schools and Ofsted-registered EY providers in England from September 2021. The reforms were designed to transform EY curriculum and assessment by focusing on what matters most for children's outcomes, particularly in communication, language, literacy, and numeracy. They were designed to:

- Put greater emphasis on early language development and cement the focus on planning rich curriculum activities rather than on tracking and data.
- Revise the ELGs to make them clearer and more specific, to make it easier for teachers to make accurate and consistent judgements when completing the EYFS profile.
- Make changes to EYFS profile assessment requirements through the removal of statutory LA moderation and the 'exceeding' judgement band, reducing the level of paperwork required and simplifying the assessment process.
- Reset the approach to ongoing assessment, to focus on effective and proportionate observation and assessment and reduce excessive paperwork.

This report has drawn on extensive survey and qualitative research among leaders and staff in EY settings, and among LAs, to explore how the reforms have been bedded into EY practice. This includes the extent to which the reforms are meeting their objectives, and where there are still gaps or unresolved issues. When discussing impacts, it should be noted that these are self-reported based on the survey and qualitative depth interviews, and not based on an impact evaluation.

Impacts on curriculum and assessment

The majority of settings had reviewed and/or made changes to their curriculum and assessment approaches as a result of the 2021 EYFS reforms. Most commonly, this involved putting less focus on observation and tracking and spending more time with children instead, followed by weaving in communication and language throughout – both in line with the objectives of the reforms. Childminders, and to a lesser extent group-based providers, were significantly less likely than other setting types to report they had made changes. While fewer settings had made changes to oral health teaching (ranging from half of childminders to around three-fifths of school-based settings and receptions), this was mainly because they were already doing this prior to the reforms.

Many settings described implementing a more child-focused curriculum, which had enriched the experiences for children and staff (as it gave them more flexibility and

opportunity to use their professional judgement). The overarching view was that the reforms had a positive impact on quality of practice and teaching.

Most of the settings that had made changes found this easy, or at least unproblematic. Where settings encountered challenges, this related mainly to a lack of time (particularly in school-based settings). This was followed by lack of guidance (especially setting-specific guidance) and support, which was raised more commonly among childminders and group-based settings. High staff turnover was a particular issue raised by group-based settings, while lack of notice to implement the reforms was cited more commonly by school-based settings and receptions which are limited to term-time delivery.

There were diverging views between EY providers and LAs about the removal of LA moderation to the EYFS profile assessment. EY settings held mixed views, with substantial minorities who thought it had no impact or who did not know. Where impacts were reported these centred around reduced stress/pressure on staff and reduced workloads. However, some settings had concerns about reduced consistency and opportunities to share best practice. LAs were more negative, with around half who thought that the removal of moderation will have a negative impact on quality of EY teaching by reducing opportunities for sharing practice, lowering standards and creating less consistency.

Impacts on workload and support available

Between two-thirds and three-quarters of leaders across the different setting types reported that time spent on assessments had decreased following the EYFS reforms. This freed up more time for staff to plan and to spend more time directly with the children. There were some exceptions, particularly in school-based settings and in reception years, where a minority reported that time on assessments had not changed. The main reason was that they were still required to follow the same assessment approaches as they had done previously, because of expectations from their senior leadership teams and regulatory bodies such as Ofsted. There have also been short-term workload increases for some leaders as they got to grips with the guidance around implementing the reforms and reviewing/developing their curricula. Generally, however, the findings suggest that the balance has moved towards more 'quality time' interacting with children and less time on paperwork, in line with the objectives of the reforms.

The majority of LAs had provided various types of support to EY settings in their area, and most of the settings who had used LA support found this useful. Where settings noted improvements, this was usually around the extent of practical support, like the training, offered by their LA, and the times that it was available (a particular

issue for childminders). Similarly, LAs faced challenges delivering support, such as lack of funding and limited staff time.

EY settings had used a variety of other types of support, including government guidance and social media. While this was positively received, there were some suggested improvements such as more setting-specific guidance, more practical examples, and more accessible guidance.

Reported impacts on children's outcomes

The majority of EY leaders thought that the EYFS reforms have or will have a positive impact on children's outcomes, ranging from three-fifths of childminders to three-quarters of school-based settings. Just over one-third of leaders in school-based settings and reception thought the reforms would have a positive impact on children's transitions to Year 1, with a similar proportion who thought it was too early to tell.

Positive views arose mainly from better quality interactions with staff, increased emphasis on communication and language, and improved personal, social and emotional development. The view was that this came about due to reduce time being spent on assessments, more time spent interacting with children and a more child-focused curriculum.

An area of more concern was about whether the reforms catered sufficiently for children with SEND or other additional needs, such as EAL. Some providers (across all setting types) highlighted this as in need of more attention within the guidance.

Learning points and issues for further consideration

Overall, the research findings indicate that the EYFS reforms have been well-received across most of the sector, are bedding in well and addressing their intended objectives. A small number of respondents flagged some areas they believed should have further consideration. These included:

- Clearer guidance, including more practical examples and greater clarity on assessments of children;
- More support for children with SEND in particular; and
- That the transition between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 can still be challenging for some children who need more support, including disadvantaged children, despite the recognised the benefits of the flexibilities in the EYFS.

More broadly, many leaders raised concerns about staff recruitment and retention in the EY sector and regarded this as a future challenge.

Technical Annex

Quantitative methodology

The quantitative strand of the research consisted of surveys with three groups: early years (EY) leaders, staff, and all local authorities in England. Fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2022.

The fieldwork with leaders consisted of four provider types: schools with nurseries; schools with one or more reception classes but no nursery; public, private, voluntary, or independent nurseries (operating in non-domestic premises); and childminders. In this report, schools with nurseries are referred to as school-based providers, and public, private, voluntary, or independent nurseries are referred to as group-based providers. The fieldwork with staff covered the same provider types, excluding childminders.

Survey design

IFF designed the three survey questionnaires with input from EY research and policy teams within DfE. Each questionnaire was cognitively tested prior to mainstage fieldwork, and a pilot was also conducted for the leader and staff surveys. The purpose of these testing stages was to refine the survey structure and question wording to ensure the questions were clear, relevant, and understood consistently across the different groups of participants.

Sampling: Reception settings and school-based settings

School-based establishments (schools with nurseries and schools with reception only) were identified from Get Information About Schools (GIAS), DfE's register of educational establishments in England and Wales. Due to the target number of responses and the projected response rate (Table), all eligible establishments were selected from GIAS.

Table CC. Required number of responses and the projected response rate (reception and school-based)

Type of Provider	Required number of responses	Projected response rate
Reception	1,000	10%
School-based	1,000	10%

Sampling: Group-based providers and childminders

Group-based providers and childminders were sampled from Ofsted’s list of all organisations providing ‘childcare on non-domestic premises’. The sampling for these two latter groups was done randomly, stratifying for region and deprivation band, and without accounting for the availability of email addresses. The list of sampled providers was shared with DfE, who then provided contact details where these were available. DfE did not know who took part in the research. Table outlines the number of responses required and projected response rates of both group-based settings and childminders.

Table DD. Required number of responses and the projected response rate (group-based and childminders)

Type of Provider	Required number of responses	Projected response rate
Group-based	1,000	10%
Childminders	1,000	12%

Survey distribution and responses

Leaders and childminders in all four provider groups were sent an email or a letter (depending on the information available for the contact) inviting them to take part in the survey. To maximise completion, up to 10 follow up reminder emails and a physical letter were sent as well.

Staff were contacted through a snowball methodology, where leaders were asked to provide contact details of up to three members of staff in their establishment, at the end of the survey. Those named individuals were then sent an email to invite them to take part in the survey, as well as up to 10 reminders. Towards the end of fieldwork an open link to the staff survey was created to facilitate participation and was shared with all leaders who had already completed the survey.

Local authorities were sent one invite email directly from DfE, plus three email reminders.

Fieldwork with leaders was completed either online or over the phone, whilst fieldwork with staff and local authorities was completed online.

Table E illustrates the number of individuals invited to the survey, the number of completed responses and the response rate.

Table EE. Response rates to surveys

Type		No. invited	No. of complete responses	Response rate (%)
Leaders	School-based	8,846	1,112	13%
	Reception	7,457	923	12%
	Group-based	7,300	634	9%
	Childminders	8,490	827	10%
	Total	32,093	3,496	11%
Staff	Via leader contacts	1,438	318	22%
	Via online open link	N/A	158	N/A
LAs		148	101	68%

Please note, 476 staff members responded to the survey, however, 9 respondents were removed during data cleaning, bringing the total number of staff responses to 467.

The response rates for leaders and local authorities were in line with expectations for a survey of this type with these audiences. The volume of staff responses was lower than expected, mainly because some leaders were reluctant to share staff contact details using the planned snowball methodology, which limited the number of contacts that could be generated. Where staff contact details were provided and staff could be emailed a survey link, the response rate was in line with expectation.

Weighting

The quantitative data for leaders was weighted to be representative within each of the four categories of setting and is therefore reported by setting type rather than at aggregate level. If aggregated, the population of childminders is far greater than the population of other types of setting (although the volume of childcare places provided via childminders is smaller) and the decision was made with DfE to report the findings for each type of setting rather than overall.

Weighting was applied by establishment size (with the exception of childminders), region and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quintile, which is based on the location of the setting. The weighted data for each setting type was

also 'grossed up'¹⁴ to reflect the population (although the base sizes in this report reflect the unweighted bases).

Table F to Table I show the figures used to weight the data for each setting type for leaders.

Table FF. Weight specification (Reception)

Key variables		Population (no.)	Population (%)	Unweighted (no.)	Unweighted (%)
Region	East Midlands	876	12%	87	9%
	East of England	1060	14%	149	16%
	London	371	5%	46	5%
	North East	167	2%	21	2%
	North West	945	13%	111	12%
	South East	1639	22%	269	29%
	South West	1188	16%	103	11%
	West Midlands	605	8%	66	7%
	Yorkshire & the Humber	606	8%	71	8%
IDACI Quintile	1st quintile (most deprived)	654	9%	81	9%

¹⁴ This means the numbers were increased to represent the gross value.

	2nd quintile	1036	14%	114	12%
	3rd quintile	1604	22%	193	21%
	4th quintile	2033	27%	243	26%
	5th quintile (least deprived)	2130	29%	292	32%
Establishment size (school)	0-49	240	3%	21	2%
	50-99	973	13%	110	12%
	100-149	979	13%	125	14%
	150-199	1256	17%	174	19%
	200-249	1378	18%	163	18%
	250-299	450	6%	55	6%
	300-349	376	5%	43	5%
	350-399	410	5%	57	6%
	400-499	795	11%	115	12%
	500-599	138	2%	15	2%
	600-699	163	2%	22	2%
	700- over 1000	99	1%	12	1%
	Unknown	200	3%	11	1%

Table GG. Weight specification (School-based)

Key variables		Population (no.)	Population (%)	Unweighted (no.)	Unweighted (%)
Region	East Midlands	680	8%	79	7%
	East of England	833	9%	112	10%
	London	1437	16%	230	21%
	North East	708	8%	81	7%
	North West	1513	17%	195	18%
	South East	753	9%	114	10%
	South West	637	7%	58	5%
	West Midlands	1149	13%	127	11%
	Yorkshire & the Humber	1136	13%	116	10%
IDACI Quintile	1st quintile (most deprived)	2610	30%	319	29%
	2nd quintile	1994	23%	243	22%
	3rd quintile	1676	19%	210	19%
	4th quintile	1418	16%	184	17%

	5th quintile (least deprived)	1148	13%	156	14%
Establishment size (school)	0-49	194	2%	23	2%
	50-99	716	8%	110	10%
	100-149	630	7%	96	9%
	150-199	745	8%	101	9%
	200-249	1739	20%	211	19%
	250-299	588	7%	65	6%
	300-349	720	8%	87	8%
	350-399	562	6%	64	6%
	400-499	1748	20%	241	22%
	500-599	311	4%	29	3%
	600-699	413	5%	47	4%
	700-799	86	1%	9	1%
	800-899	62	1%	8	1%
	900-999	31	0%	4	0%
	Over 1000	64	1%	6	1%
	Unknown	237	3%	11	1%

Table HH. Weight specification (Group-based)

Key variables		Population (no.)	Population (%)	Unweighted (no.)	Unweighted (%)
Region	East Midlands	1977	8%	61	10%
	East of England	2908	12%	86	14%
	London	4357	18%	67	11%
	North East	711	3%	29	5%
	North West	2975	12%	61	10%
	South East	4873	20%	128	20%
	South West	2468	10%	91	14%
	West Midlands	2193	9%	57	9%
	Yorkshire & the Humber	1938	8%	54	9%
IDACI Quintile	1st quintile (most deprived)	3827	16%	76	12%
	2nd quintile	4619	19%	125	20%
	3rd quintile	4978	20%	126	20%
	4th quintile	5244	21%	154	24%

	5th quintile (least deprived)	5732	23%	153	24%
Establishment size (number of pupils)	0-49	15938	65%	459	72%
	50-99	7017	29%	150	24%
	100-1000+	1449	6%	25	4%

Table II. Weight specification (Childminders)

Key variables		Population (no.)	Population (%)	Unweighted (no.)	Unweighted (%)
Region	East Midlands	2338	8%	71	9%
	East of England	3680	12%	101	12%
	London	5869	20%	137	17%
	North East	1180	4%	36	4%
	North West	3393	11%	86	10%
	South East	5686	19%	179	22%
	South West	2636	9%	85	10%
	West Midlands	2306	8%	65	8%
	Yorkshire & the Humber	2900	10%	67	8%

IDACI Quintile	1st quintile (most deprived)	4315	14%	106	13%
	2nd quintile	5974	20%	167	20%
	3rd quintile	6476	22%	166	20%
	4th quintile	6751	23%	204	25%
	5th quintile (least deprived)	6472	22%	184	22%

The staff and local authority survey data was not weighted. The bases of these surveys were relatively small which means that applying any weighting should be carefully considered due to its impact on the effective sample size for statistical reliability (the 'design effect' of the weights). It was decided that local authority weighting was not necessary, due to the good response rate and the coverage of the achieved sample being close to the overall population. For the staff survey, because of the challenges in obtaining a response rate from the original methodology and the eventual change to an open link, it was decided not to apply weights.

Qualitative methodology

The qualitative strand of the research consisted of 60 interviews with leaders and staff at schools with nurseries (school-based providers), schools with reception only, private nurseries (group-based providers) and with childminders.

This fieldwork was carried out between 21st February and 27th March 2023.

Interviews were completed on Teams, Zoom or over the phone and each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Sampling

Participants were asked at the end of the survey if they were willing to be recontacted about taking part in the qualitative interviews. From those who agreed, IFF selected a sample to ensure coverage across the range of EY provider types, and to ensure representation across a range of survey responses at key questions.

This included: length of time in role (leaders only), length of time in sector, region, changes made following of the reforms, how time spent completing assessment paperwork has changed, changes made to oral health activities, barriers to implementation, and what effects they thought the reforms have had on children so far.

Recruitment and responses

Those that were selected were sent an email asking them to confirm they would still like to participate in the qualitative research.

Table J and Table K illustrate the number of completed interviews by settings, staff vs. leaders and the key variables used to select the sample.

Table JJ. Qualitative interviewees (completed interviews by setting and staff vs. leaders)

Type of Provider	Leader interviews	Staff interviews	Total interviews
Reception	10	5	15
School-based	10	5	15
Group-based	10	5	15
Childminders	15	N/A	15
Total	45	15	60

Table KK. Qualitative interviewees (completed interviews by key variables for both leaders and staff)

Key variables		Total
Region	East Midlands	7
	East of England	7
	London	7
	North East	3
	North West	6
	South East	11
	South West	7
	West Midlands	6
	Yorkshire & the Humber	6
Experienced barriers	Yes	20
	No	14
	Did not answer	26
Changes made as a result of the reforms	Reviewed curriculum/L&D approach	52
	Made changes to curriculum/L&D approach	48
	Assessment practices	46
	None	3
Time spent completing assessment paperwork	Increased	5
	Stayed the same	13

	Reduced	42
Changes made to oral health activities	Yes	32
	No	24
Impact of reforms on children	Positive	41
	Negative	5

Analysis and reporting

For the analysis and reporting stage, IFF developed an analysis framework linked to the research questions which enabled the exploration of themes by the variables included in Table K. This framework included a row per respondent, and a column for each of the variables, plus the questions covered in the topic guide.

While the findings from qualitative research provide robust and detailed insight, it should be noted that the qualitative research was designed to provide representation across the sample and was not designed to be representative. It is therefore not generalisable to the wider population.

EYFS 2021 Reforms Infographic



Early Years Foundation Stage 2021 Reforms



IFF Research 2023

The research used surveys and interviews to assess how the 2021 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) reforms have been embedded into practice, and identify any ongoing gaps or support needs. The research involved surveying 101 local authorities, 3496 leaders, and 476 staff, as well as conducting in-depth interviews with 60 leaders and staff from 4 different types of EY settings



School-based provider (SBP)



Reception



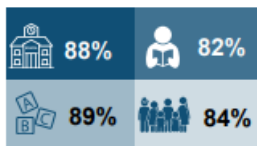
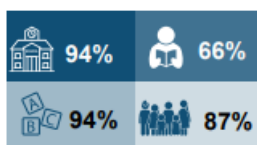
Childminder



Group-based provider (GBP)

Changes made following the reforms

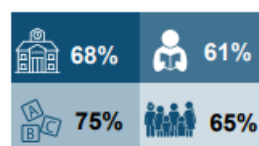
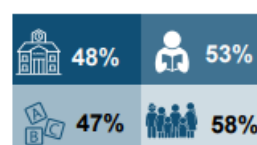
Most EY leaders made changes to their curriculum / learning and development approach



...of those who made these changes, over 8 in 10 leaders put less focus on observation / tracking, consistent with the EYFS reforms

Impacts of reforms on children

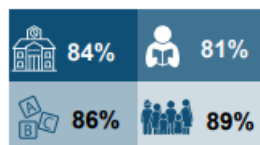
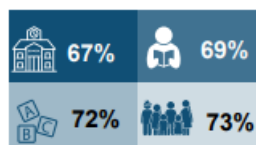
Most leaders thought that the reforms have a positive impact on learning and development



...among these leaders, around half noted that the reforms were leading to children having better quality interactions with staff

Changes made to assessment practices

The majority of leaders who made changes to their assessment practices reported that time on assessment paperwork had reduced...



...among these, spending more time with children was seen as the main benefit.

Conclusions

The reforms have been well-received and most found implementation easy.

In particular, there is:

- Better quality interactions with staff
- More emphasis on communication and language
- Improved personal, social and emotional development

Potential areas for further consideration include:

- Supporting children with SEND and other additional needs
- Transition between EYFS and KS1



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