Identifying vulnerable children using routine information available to schools

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How to use scores from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile to detect unidentified SEN and other vulnerabilities

Our key recommendations

Scientific evidence suggests the following actions might be useful to your school in identifying children who may benefit from additional support:

1. **Investigate and closely monitor children who did not reach a good level of development in the EYFS Profile as they are at higher risk of having unidentified SEN, performing below expected levels on academic assessments, and having other vulnerabilities.**

2. **If there are any concerns about a child's progress in primary or secondary school, outcomes from the EYFS Profile should be consulted to examine whether the child is at elevated risk of having unidentified SEN.**

Your school may already be taking these actions. If so, we would like to highlight the science that supports your actions! If not, we would like to recommend you consider implementing these actions as they can help identify children who are at risk and currently 'under the radar'.

What evidence are these recommendations based on?

Statutory assessments, such as the EYFS Profile, provide teachers and school leaders with a wealth of knowledge and insight. Our research suggests that data from the EYFS Profile can help schools, teachers, and other staff in decision-making about children who may need additional support. This will ensure that each child reaches their full potential, both in the classroom and beyond.

The research shows that the EYFS Profile can be used to identify children at elevated risk of need and vulnerability - including having SEN and performing below expected levels academically (see boxes below).

Our ongoing research also suggests that children who do not reach a good level of development are more likely to be persistently absent from school and are at increased risk of being 'not in employment, education, or training' (NEET) in early adulthood.

Putting this evidence into practice:

Case study: Dixons Academies Trust

Dixons Music Primary (Bradford) uses the EYFS Profile to check what extra support students need on entry. EYFS Profile scores are also used to drive intervention throughout a student's time in primary school. In particular, staff focus on the areas of development where students need support. Dixons Trinity Academy, the secondary school that is co-located with Dixons Music Primary, is also currently considering how to make use of EYFS Profile outcomes beyond primary school.

- **James Lauder**, *Assistant Vice Principal, Dixons Trinity Academy*

Our research has found that children who do not reach a good level of development are approximately:

6 x	**9 x**	**7 x**
more likely to be identified as having SEN in the future compared to children who reach a good level of development	more likely to perform below expected in future reading assessments compared to children who reach a good level of development	more likely to perform below expected in future maths assessments compared to children who reach a good level of development

The science behind our findings and recommendations

We outline below our studies which have demonstrated a relationship between the EYFS Profile, SEN identification, and academic achievement.
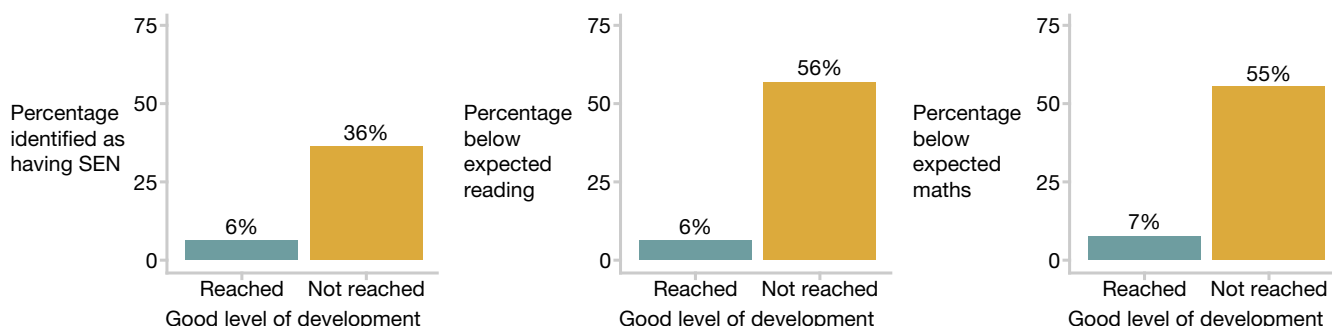
1. Does the EYFS Profile identify children at increased risk of needing SEN support?

Method: We analysed data from over 3000 children who are part of the Born in Bradford cohort study.

Outcome: Only 6% of children who reached a good level of development were identified as having SEN in the following 4-6 years, compared to 36% of children who did not reach a good level of development[1].

Learning: Outcomes from the EYFS Profile can identify children who are at elevated risk of needing SEN support in the future. Use of the EYFS Profile may therefore facilitate earlier identification of SEN. It may also reduce structural inequalities that exist in the identification of SEN.

Our ongoing work: We have recently repeated our analyses in an even larger dataset: Connected Bradford[2]. Using data from over 50,000 children across the Bradford district, we found similar results.

2. Does the EYFS Profile identify children at increased risk of performing below expected levels academically?

Method: Analysis of data from over 5000 children from the Born in Bradford cohort study.

Outcomes: Children who did not reach a good level of development were much more likely to perform below expected levels at the end of Key Stage 1 compared to children who reached a good level of development. This was observed across a range of subject areas, including reading and maths. For example, 56% of children who did not reach a good level of development performed below expected levels in the Key Stage 1 reading assessment, compared to only 6% of children who reached a good level of development[1].

Learning: Outcomes from the EYFS Profile can identify children who are at higher risk of performing below expected levels academically.

Our ongoing work: We have recently found that the good level of development also predicts academic achievement at the end of Key Stage 2[3], persistent school absenteeism[4], and being not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in early adulthood[5].

References

1. Atkinson, A. L., Hill, L. J. B., Pettinger, K. J., Wright, J., Hart, A. R., Dickerson, J., & Mon-Williams, M. (2022). Can holistic school readiness evaluations predict academic achievement and special educational needs status? Evidence from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. *Learning and Instruction*, 77, 101537.

2. Wood, M., Gunning, L. Relins, S., Sohal, K., Wright, J., Mon-Williams, M., & Atkinson, A. (Under revision). Identification of Special Educational Needs and structural inequalities through a population-based study of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

3. Atkinson *et al*. (In preparation). From poor school readiness to good academic achievement: what factors are associated with overcoming poor school readiness?

4. Wood *et al*. (In preparation). Does the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile predict persistent school absences?

5. Warburton *et al*. (In preparation). An early-life measure of school readiness is associated with later chances of becoming not in employment, education, or training (NEET)

Percentage identified as having SEN — Good level of development: Reached 6%, Not reached 36%

Percentage below expected reading — Good level of development: Reached 6%, Not reached 56%

Percentage below expected maths — Good level of development: Reached 7%, Not reached 55%

Please note:

The EYFS Profile is not a diagnostic tool. Nevertheless, outcomes from the EYFS Profile may be useful to special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in making and communicating a decision on referral, alongside other information. If you have concerns about a particular child, please speak to your school's SENCO.

What's next?

Our group is continuing to explore how outcomes from the EYFS Profile can be used by schools and teachers. Together with Educational Psychologists and SENCOs, we are also creating an Electronic Developmental Support Tool. This is closely based on the EYFS Profile and will allow educational professionals to assess academic and non-academic skills at any point during a child's school career. It is hoped that this will facilitate earlier identification of SEN.

To keep updated on our findings, please see the Centre for Applied Education Website (CAER).

Get in touch!

If you would like to discuss these findings further, please feel free to contact us via the CAER website. We would also be very interested to hear if any changes to your practice are implemented based on our findings. If so, please do get in touch!

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