

Mr K Power
Wynstones School
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Our ref: 2008/0004992
6 February 2008

Dear Mr Power,

Thank you for your letter of 10 December. I apologise for the delay in replying.

As you acknowledged in your letter, the consultation on the EYFS learning and development exemptions closed in May and the Government published its response on the website in August. You will also know that we have had considerable debate with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship about the way in which Steiner settings can operate within the EYFS framework.

The Government consultation on exemptions to the learning and development requirements ran from 1 March to 24 May last year and representative bodies, including the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF), were made aware of the consultation and invited to respond. SWSF submitted a formal response to the consultation. The Government response to the consultation which was published in August acknowledged the feeling among a significant proportion of respondents that exemptions should not be necessary in the majority of cases because of the breadth and flexibility of the EYFS, and therefore revised the proposed circumstances for exemptions to allow them only on a short-term basis for providers who lack the capacity to meet the full requirements, or, in response to parental request, to meet the needs of individual children. In reaching this decision the Government made it clear that it would keep this policy under review and, if necessary, would consider revising it at a later date.

The purpose of the EYFS is to ensure that all children can get the best possible start in life regardless of their background. It offers practitioners freedom to support this in a way which reflects their philosophy and professional judgement of children's needs for development and learning.

I appreciate that you, and other correspondents, feel deeply about the issues that you have raised. As mentioned above, the proposed legislation on exemptions to the learning and development requirements will allow parents to apply to settings for exemptions to some or all of the learning and



development requirements in respect of individual children, if they can show that the EYFS is in conflict with their beliefs or philosophies. Guidance on this will be issued later in the year when the regulations governing exemptions are published.

It has always been the Government's intention for the EYFS to be a flexible framework, not a curriculum or formal schooling, and one that is able to accommodate a wide range of philosophies and approaches. It is centred on learning through play and the development of social, cognitive, physical and emotional skills for all children in an inclusive, safe and secure environment. It places equal value on all areas of development. It promotes continuous assessment through observation by practitioners, who are encouraged to judge the appropriate pace of learning for the children with whom they work.

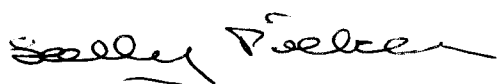
The early learning goals are intended to be developmental milestones for children and are based on professional advice about what most children can achieve with support by the age of 5+. They are not set in stone and we would certainly not expect all children to achieve all of those milestones by the end of the EYFS. Every child is different and they develop at different rates in different areas of learning. It is for practitioners to judge how best to support children towards the milestones, and what pace and style of learning is best for each individual child.

Finally, I can reassure you that the EYFS Statutory Framework has not been changed since it was published in March 2007, other than an errata slip in respect of the printed version. The online version to which reference is made in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2007 and the Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development Requirements) Order 2007 is correct and has not been changed to date. We are planning to issue a revised Statutory Framework which will be the subject of an amending order later this year in order to clarify some of the welfare requirements on which we have received a number of enquiries.

I hope that we can continue to work with you and the Steiner movement in general to find a way forward.

I am copying this letter to Janni Nicol, Sylvie Sklan and all the Steiner settings and parents who have written to me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally Pickles', written in a cursive style.

Sally Pickles
Early Years and Extended Schools