Communication and language should be given greater emphasis than literacy in young children's development, the review into the Early Years Foundation Stage recommends.

- EYFS should stay mandatory for all early years providers
- Three 'prime' areas of learning: communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development
- 69 early learning goals cut to 17

In an exclusive interview with *Nursery World* ahead of the review's publication, Dame Clare Tickell, who chaired the review, said there should be a shift away from giving equal weight to all six areas of learning in the EYFS.

She also said the EYFS should remain mandatory for everyone working with children from birth to five, including childminders.

Dame Clare says early years practitioners should give particular focus to three 'prime areas' of learning and development: communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, and physical development.

She told *Nursery World*, 'What I'm saying is that if you take communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development, and physical development, and see these as particularly prime for the nought to threes, concentrate on these three.'

She added, 'Without communication and language it's difficult to develop literacy.'

However, she stressed that she was not suggesting that with 'a highly curious three-year-old', early years practitioners need not work on children's literacy.
I'm not saying they're mutually exclusive. If you haven't got communication and language, PSED and physical development, children will struggle with those other areas.

The four other areas are expressive arts and design, literacy, mathematics and understanding the world.

'The Early Years Foundation Stage is a success story,' said Dame Clare. 'There's a huge amount of support for it that came through in the call for evidence.'

She added, 'It's too early to start to allow people to opt out.'

However, she said that the EYFS 'could be slimmer - there's a fair amount of repetition' and that often, practitioners were not clear about the difference between the statutory guidance and the framework.

Dame Clare also said that there was a certain amount of overlap between the 69 Early Learning Goals and that she was therefore recommending that the number of goals be reduced to 17 to reflect this.

'What I'm recommending is that they can be taken down to 17 without losing any of their importance,' she said.

**Early years checks**

Dame Clare is also recommending giving children 'a short check by early years practitioners at two to two-and-a-half years, alongside the health visitor check. The sooner we can identify developmental delay for children with special educational needs, we have a much better chance at getting them support.'

The idea is that early years practitioners start doing these checks as part of the Healthy Child Programme. Dame Clare said she was making a particular recommendation that the early years development check should be written up by practitioners and inserted into the 'red book', which all parents are given as a record of their child's health.

She said this would include parents more, and would mean that parents could share the information easily with their health visitor. The development check would look, for example, at whether children are able to manage their feelings and behaviour, and play alongside other children.

There is also a recommendation that the 'slimmed down' Early Years Foundation Stage Profile include a check against the Early Learning Goals, to see whether children's development is 'emerging' - below expectation; 'expected' - in line with where you would expect a child to be at the age of five; or 'exceeding' - working beyond the expected level.

While the framework should remain mandatory, Dame Clare said that ministers should consider simplifying the exemption process for independent schools and Steiner Waldorf settings to opt out of some of the EYFS learning and development requirements, 'if ministers can think of some way of assuring them of ongoing quality'.
Currently, Steiner Waldorf schools and kindergartens are required to apply individually for exemption from specific early learning goals that they are philosophically opposed to and must have their request considered on a case by case basis. These are related to ICT and the early introduction of formal literacy and numeracy. Dame Clare said that because Steiner schools wish to opt out from the same goals, the process should be made easier.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said, 'The Government will be responding fully to the report in the summer. Any changes will take place in autumn 2012 at the earliest.'

**Key recommendations from the EYFS review**

- The six areas of learning to be replaced with seven areas
- Three prime areas: communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development
- Four other areas: literacy, mathematics, expressive arts and design, understanding the world
- The 69 Early Learning Goals covering the areas of learning should be reduced to 17
- Early years practitioners to carry out a child development check with children between 24 and 36 months of age
- A summary report of the check should be included in the 'red book', which all parents are given and kept alongside their child's health records
- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile to be 'slimmed down' to take account of changes to the number of Early Learning Goals
- The EYFS Profile should include a simple scale to measure whether children's learning and development at the age of five is emerging, expected or exceeding the Early Learning Goals
- Ministers should consider the findings of the Advisory Panel for Food and Nutrition and provide guidelines for healthy eating and nutritional requirements for under-fives to early years practitioners
- A graduate-led early years workforce should continue to be an aspiration for the Government
- Entry qualifications to early years should be of a high standard consistent with the NNEB qualification