

Jack Benney

Student Number: 2104744

(ECEY6010/C)

Early Years Curricula

Word Count: 4,198

(AI was not used in this assignment)

Critically Analysing the Challenges of Implementing Play-Based Curricula

Play has long been recognised as a fundamental aspect of children's learning and development within early years education. According to GOV.UK (2014), Early Years Foundation Stage framework places significant emphasis on the importance of learning through play, highlighting that children learn most effectively when they are actively engaged, motivated and able to explore their environment independently. Play-based curricula are designed to support children's holistic development by encouraging creativity, problem-solving, communication and social interaction. The concept of play within education has been influenced by a range of theorists including Froebel, Piaget and Vygotsky, whose ideas continue to shape early years practice. Current guidance documents, such as Development Matters and Birth to Five Matters, reflect these theoretical perspectives by encouraging practitioners to support children's learning through exploration, curiosity and meaningful interactions, as stated by GOV.UK (2017) and Early Years Coalition (2021). Despite the support for play-based learning, implementing a play-based curriculum within the early years settings presents challenges. Practitioners are often required to balance children's interests with educational expectations, assessment requirements and increasing pressure to ensure school readiness. Furthermore, limitations like staffing, funding and professional training can impact the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. While some argue that play provides the most appropriate context for

young children's learning, critics suggest that excessive emphasis on play may not properly prepare children for the more formal learning environments later in education. This debate highlights the complexity of implementing play-based curricula within modern early years settings. Therefore, this essay critically analyses the challenges associated with implementing play-based curricula, focusing on practitioner knowledge, school readiness, environmental factors and inclusion.

Understanding Play-Based Curriculum

A play-based curriculum is an educational approach in which children's learning is primarily supported through meaningful play experiences. Within the EYFS framework, play is identified as a central vehicle for learning and development, supporting children across all areas of the curriculum, according to GOV.UK (2014). Rather than viewing play as separate from education, play-based approaches recognise that children construct knowledge through active engagement with their environment. This perspective aligns with the belief that learning occurs most effectively when children are motivated by their own interests and experiences. The foundations of play-based education can be traced back to Friedrich Froebel, who described play as the highest expression of human development during childhood. His belief that children learn through exploration remains highly influential within contemporary early years education. Similarly, Piaget argued that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, while Vygotsky emphasised the importance of social interactions and adult support in extending children's learning. These theoretical perspectives continue to influence current frameworks such as Development Matters, which encourages practitioners to provide rich opportunities for exploration and discovery, as supported by GOV.UK (2017).

However, despite broad agreement regarding the value of play, there remains considerable disagreement about what effective play-based learning looks like in practice. According to Play England, play should be freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated, as stated by Play England (2026). Alternatively, some practitioners advocate for greater levels of adult involvement to ensure that learning objectives are achieved, according to Early Years Coalition (2021). This tension highlights a key challenge within play-based curricula, as settings may interpret policy guidance differently and therefore provide varied

experiences for children. Birth to Five Matters (2026) argues that children benefit most when practitioners strike a balance between child-initiated and adult-supported learning. Though, achieving this balance can be difficult in practice. If practitioners intervene too frequently, children's autonomy may be reduced.

Practitioner Knowledge and Professional Development

One of the most significant challenges associated with implementing a play-based curriculum is ensuring that practitioners possess the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate meaningful learning through play. Foundation Years (2026) explains that although the EYFS places considerable emphasis on play-based learning, practitioners' understanding of play pedagogy can vary significantly depending on their qualifications, training and professional experience.

Research discussed by the Early Years Alliance suggests that some practitioners continue to associate learning primarily with adult-led teaching rather than child-led exploration, as explained by Early Years Alliance (2026). As a result, opportunities for meaningful play may be reduced in favour of structured activities that produce visible and measurable outcomes. This can create tensions between educational accountability and child-centred practice. While adult involvement undoubtedly plays an important role in supporting children's development, excessive direction can restrict children's independence, creativity and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, workforce challenges continue to affect the quality of play-based provision across the sector. Nursery World (2026) reports ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties within early years education, resulting in increased pressures on existing staff. Staff shortages can reduce opportunities for high-quality interactions and limit practitioners' ability to observe, assess and extend children's learning effectively. Consequently, the successful implementation of play-based curricula may be influenced as much by workforce capacity as by pedagogical beliefs.

Another issue is the consistency of practice across settings. Some practitioners have extensive training in child development and play pedagogy, while others rely more on personal experience or organisational expectations. This can lead to variations in the quality of provision children receive. In some cases, practitioners may struggle to recognise learning

opportunities in spontaneous play, resulting in missed developmental opportunities. Alternatively, they may over-direct activities to demonstrate educational outcomes, which can undermine the child-centred nature of play-based learning.

The National Children's Bureau (2026) highlights the importance of ongoing training in helping practitioners develop confidence in facilitating play-based learning. Settings that invest in professional development are often better positioned to create a shared understanding of play and implement consistent approaches across their workforce. Therefore, although practitioner knowledge represents a significant challenge within play-based curricula, it should be viewed within the wider context of sector-wide pressures, organisational support and professional learning opportunities.

School Readiness and Curriculum Pressures

A further challenge associated with implementing play-based curricula is the increasing emphasis placed upon school readiness. In recent years, educational policy and public discourse have focused heavily on ensuring that children possess the skills required to succeed within formal schooling. While preparing children for future education is an important objective, this emphasis can sometimes conflict with the principles underpinning play-based learning. Many parents and practitioners view literacy and numeracy attainment as key indicators of readiness for school. Consequently, early years settings may feel pressured to introduce more formal teaching methods at increasingly younger ages. This can result in a reduction in opportunities for child-initiated play as practitioners attempt to demonstrate measurable progress in preparation for school entry. According to the Foundation Years website (2026), effective early years practice should support children's development through meaningful experiences rather than prioritising formal instruction. Nevertheless, balancing these expectations remains a significant challenge.

Critics of the school readiness agenda, argue that an overemphasis on academic outcomes can overlook the wider developmental benefits of play, such as communication, emotional regulation, resilience and problem-solving. Prioritising formal learning too heavily may limit these important experiences. However, as stated by University of Cambridge (2022), supporters argue that early intervention can reduce inequalities and improve long-term

outcomes, with adult-led teaching playing a valuable role when used appropriately. The key challenge is therefore finding a balance between play and formal teaching that supports children's development. This requires practitioners to use professional judgement and recognise that play and learning are closely connected.

Environmental and Resource Constraints

The successful implementation of a play-based curriculum depends heavily on the quality of the learning environment. Children need access to stimulating indoor and outdoor spaces, suitable resources and opportunities for exploration. However, many settings lack the financial resources to provide these consistently. Funding pressures can limit access to quality resources, outdoor equipment and professional development, while rising costs further reduce the range and quality of play experiences available.

Staffing ratios also impact delivery. HFL Education (2025) states that effective play-based learning relies on practitioners being able to observe, interact with and respond to children's interests. Staff have a direct influence on the quality of care, safety and learning. When staffing is limited, practitioners may focus more on supervision and routine tasks, reducing meaningful interactions that support learning. As a result, both financial and staffing constraints can limit the effectiveness of play-based provision despite practitioners' best efforts.

Inclusion and Diversity

Inclusion is another challenge when implementing play-based curricula. Early years settings support children from a range of cultural, linguistic and developmental backgrounds, so practitioners must ensure play opportunities are accessible and meaningful for all. Children with special educational needs and disabilities may require adaptations to resources, environments and teaching approaches. The SEND Code of Practice highlights the importance of providing personalised support to meet individual needs according to GOV.UK (2024). However, achieving genuine inclusion can be difficult when settings face staffing, funding or expertise limitations. Cultural diversity must also be recognised within play-based curricula. Children bring different experiences, values and perspectives, and

practitioners should provide diverse resources and experiences that help all children feel valued and represented. Language barriers can present further challenges. Children who speak English as an additional language may initially find communication difficult, although play can support language development through interaction and shared experiences. While play-based curricula can benefit all children, successful inclusion requires careful planning and practitioner awareness to ensure every child can fully participate.

Considering the Concept of the Unique Child

The concept of the unique child is one of the four guiding principles underpinning the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It is based on the belief that every child develops in individual ways and at different rates, influenced by their experiences, abilities, interests and backgrounds, as supported by GOV.UK (2014). Within play-based curricula, recognising each child as unique is essential because learning opportunities are often shaped around children's interests, choices and developmental needs. As a result, assessment and progress tracking systems must be flexible enough to capture children's individual learning journeys while also providing practitioners with evidence of development and achievement. Assessment has always played a significant role within early years education. Practitioners are expected to monitor children's progress, identify potential concerns and support future learning. However, tensions often arise between the desire to respect children's individuality and the need to measure progress against developmental expectations.

The Concept of the Unique Child

The principle of the unique child, as defined by GOV.UK (2014), recognises that every child is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. This perspective reflects the understanding that children's development is influenced by a combination of biological, social, cultural and environmental factors. Consequently, children cannot be expected to follow identical developmental pathways or achieve milestones at precisely the same time. Within play-based curricula, the unique child principle encourages practitioners to observe children's interests and provide experiences that reflect individual needs. Birth to Five Matters (2026) supports this and emphasises that development is not

linear and that children may progress rapidly in some areas while requiring additional support in others.

Birth to 5 matters (2026) also explains that practitioners are often required to assess children's progress against age-related expectations and curriculum goals. These frameworks can create pressure to compare children against predetermined standards rather than recognising individual differences. This raises important questions regarding whether current assessment practices support the concept of the unique child or undermine it. Cultural differences can influence perceptions of development and achievement. Behaviours considered desirable in one context may not be valued in another, suggesting that assessments based solely on universal expectations may fail to reflect children's diverse experiences. Therefore, although the unique child principle remains central to early years education, implementing it effectively within assessment practices continues to present challenges.

Observation-Based Assessment

Observation is widely regarded as one of the most appropriate methods of assessment within play-based curricula because it enables practitioners to gather information about children's learning in natural contexts. Rather than removing children from activities to complete formal assessments, practitioners observe children's interactions, behaviours and achievements as they engage in play. GOV.UK (2017) - Development Matters, identifies observation as an essential component of effective practice because it allows practitioners to understand children's interests and plan meaningful learning experiences. One of the main strengths of observation-based assessment is its ability to capture authentic learning. Children are more likely to demonstrate their true abilities when engaged in familiar and enjoyable activities than during formal testing situations, according to Soto-Icaza *et al...* (2015). Through observation, practitioners can gain insights into children's communication skills, problem-solving abilities, social relationships and emotional development. This approach aligns closely with the unique child principle because it focuses on individual learning experiences rather than standardised performance measures.

Connect Childcare (2026) suggests that observation also supports responsive teaching by helping practitioners identify children's interests and developmental needs. Connect Childcare (2026) also states that it is particularly valuable in play-based curricula where learning often emerges through children's choices and interactions. However, observation-based assessment has limitations. One concern is subjectivity, as different practitioners may interpret and record children's behaviour differently. Personal beliefs and experiences can influence observations, leading to inconsistencies in assessment. Observation can also be time-consuming, and busy practitioners may struggle to balance it with supervision, planning and administrative tasks. As a result, observations may be brief or incomplete. While observation-based assessment is highly compatible with play-based learning and the unique child principle, it should be carried out systematically and used alongside other assessment methods to provide a more complete picture of children's development.

Progress Tracking within Play-Based Curricula

Progress tracking systems are commonly used within early years settings to monitor children's development over time. These systems may include learning journals, online assessment platforms, developmental checklists and portfolios of children's work. Their primary purpose is to provide evidence of learning, support planning and identify children who may require additional support. Supporters of progress tracking argue that it provides valuable information regarding children's development. By monitoring progress over time, practitioners can identify patterns, celebrate achievements and address concerns at an early stage. Progress tracking can also strengthen partnerships with parents by providing opportunities to share information about children's learning experiences. According to Foundation Years, effective assessment should support children's development rather than simply measure attainment, as supported by Foundation Years (2026).

However, progress tracking has attracted significant criticism within recent years. One concern is that excessive data collection can divert practitioners' attention away from direct interactions with children. Ofsted has repeatedly stated that practitioners should avoid producing unnecessary paperwork that does not contribute meaningfully to children's

learning, according to GOV.UK (N.D). Some settings continue to collect large amounts of assessment evidence due to concerns regarding accountability and inspection requirements. Another criticism is that progress tracking systems can encourage a focus on measurable outcomes rather than holistic development. Children may be viewed through the lens of developmental targets and assessment criteria, potentially reducing opportunities for spontaneous exploration and creativity. This can be particularly problematic within play-based curricula, where learning is often complex, unpredictable and difficult to quantify.

Digital assessment systems may create additional challenges. Although technology can improve efficiency, Mentally Healthy Schools (2026) states that practitioners may feel pressured to record evidence continuously, resulting in increased workload and reduced time spent engaging with children. This can lead to the practitioners mental and physical health depleting and having a knock-on effect with the children in their care. Critics argue that assessment should enhance practice rather than become an administrative burden. On the other hand, completely abandoning progress tracking would create difficulties in identifying developmental concerns and evaluating the effectiveness of provision. Therefore, the challenge lies in finding a balanced approach that supports children's learning while avoiding excessive documentation. Progress tracking can be beneficial when used thoughtfully, but it should not dominate practitioners' time or undermine the principles of play-based learning.

Age and Stage-Related Development Models

Age and stage-related developmental models have traditionally played a significant role in early years education. These models provide guidance regarding typical patterns of development and are often used to inform assessment, planning and intervention. Influential theorists such as Piaget proposed that children progress through predictable developmental stages, while contemporary guidance documents continue to outline age-related expectations for learning and development. One advantage of developmental models is that they provide practitioners with a framework for understanding children's growth. By identifying typical developmental patterns, practitioners can recognise when children may require additional support or intervention. Development Matters (2017) and

Birth to Five Matters (2021) both provide examples of developmental pathways that can assist practitioners.

Developmental models can support communication between practitioners, parents and other professionals by providing a shared framework for discussing children's progress. However, Gowrie (2026) states that they have been criticised for suggesting that development follows a predictable pattern. Children develop at different rates and are influenced by factors such as culture, family experiences and individual differences. Critics also argue that these models can encourage a focus on what children cannot do rather than recognising their strengths. In addition, many developmental theories are based on Western views of childhood and may not reflect all cultural experiences. As a result, developmental models are most effective when used as flexible guides rather than strict measures of achievement. They remain valuable tools but should be applied alongside professional judgement and an understanding of each child's unique development.

Alternative and Strengths-Based Approaches to Assessment

In response to concerns surrounding traditional assessment methods, Hervatin (2020) states that some practitioners have adopted alternative approaches that place greater emphasis on children's strengths and individual experiences. Learning stories, narrative assessments and child-centred documentation are examples of approaches that seek to capture learning in a more holistic manner. These methods focus on what children can do rather than identifying what they cannot do. Hervatin (2020) continues by stating that they encourage practitioners to document significant moments of learning and explore the meaning behind children's actions and interactions. Such approaches align closely with the unique child principle because they celebrate individuality and recognise diverse pathways of development. However, strengths-based approaches also present challenges. Narrative assessments can be time-consuming and may lack consistency between practitioners. Furthermore, they may provide less easily measurable evidence of progress, which can create difficulties when communicating with external agencies or demonstrating accountability. Therefore, while alternative approaches offer valuable insights into children's learning, they are most effective when combined with other assessment methods.

Why Curriculum Change in Early Years Settings Requires More Than Good Intentions

The importance of play within early years education has been debated for decades, yet few practitioners would disagree that play remains one of the most powerful ways young children learn and develop. Archer (2022) states that curriculum changes continue to emerge in response to updated guidance, new research and changing societal expectations. While these changes are intended to improve outcomes for children, implementing curriculum change in early years settings are rarely straightforward. Whether introducing a new play-based approach, reviewing assessment procedures or adapting provision to meet a changing cohort, successful implementation requires careful planning, collaboration and reflection. One of the most important considerations when introducing curriculum change is having a clear vision. Practitioners and leaders need to understand why changes are being made and what they are intended to achieve for children. Without clarity, settings can become focused on responding to pressures like inspection frameworks or policy changes, rather than considering the impact on children's learning experiences. A clear vision helps ensure curriculum development remains centred on children's needs rather than becoming an administrative exercise.

Within play-based curricula, maintaining a strong focus on children's interests and developmental needs is particularly important. GOV.UK (2014) highlights the importance of recognising every child as a unique individual who learns and develops in different ways. Therefore, curriculum changes should enhance opportunities for children to explore, investigate and learn through meaningful experiences rather than imposing rigid structures that restrict creativity and independence. Another significant factor influencing successful curriculum implementation is practitioner confidence. Research and guidance consistently demonstrate that the quality of interactions between adults and children plays a crucial role in children's learning and development, as supported by GOV.UK (2017). However, practitioners cannot be expected to implement curriculum changes effectively if they do not fully understand the principles underpinning those changes.

Professional development should therefore be considered a priority. When introducing new approaches, practitioners need opportunities to discuss ideas, ask questions and reflect upon their practice. Brown (2021) states that this will help them develop a sense for pattern

spotting. Brown (2021) also continues to state that training should move beyond simply explaining new procedures and instead focus on developing a shared understanding of why particular approaches are beneficial for children. When staff feel confident and supported, they are more likely to embrace change positively and implement it consistently across the setting. Leadership also plays a vital role during periods of curriculum development. Effective leaders create an environment in which practitioners feel valued and included within decision-making processes. Rather than imposing change from the top down, successful leaders encourage collaboration and professional dialogue. This not only improves staff engagement but also helps identify potential challenges before they become significant barriers to implementation.

Listening to children is an important but sometimes overlooked aspect of curriculum review. Childcare & Education (2020) states that while children are central to early years practice, decisions are not always shaped by their perspectives. Observing their interests and responses can help practitioners identify what is working well and what needs to change. Engagement levels can also guide planning, ensuring experiences remain meaningful and relevant. Partnerships with parents and carers are also important, as families provide valuable insight into children's learning. However, some parents may not fully understand the value of play-based learning and may prefer more formal approaches. Clear communication, sharing observations and explaining the purpose of play can help build understanding and support learning at home. Childcare Now (2025) states that the physical environment should also be reviewed during curriculum change, as it strongly influences engagement and development. Settings should ensure spaces and resources support exploration, creativity and independence, which may involve adjusting layouts or improving access to materials. Resource limitations remain a challenge across the sector, with funding and staffing pressures affecting provision. However, effective curriculum implementation is not solely dependent on budgets. Through creativity, leadership and reflection, practitioners can often make the most of existing resources.

Assessment practices should also be reviewed when implementing curriculum changes. Within play-based curricula, assessment should support children's learning rather than dominate it. Practitioners need systems that provide meaningful information about

children's development while allowing sufficient time for interactions and relationship-building. Recent discussions across the sector have highlighted concerns regarding excessive documentation and unnecessary paperwork, according to GOV.UK (N.D). While assessment remains important, it should never become the primary focus of practice. Curriculum reviews provide valuable opportunities to consider whether existing assessment systems genuinely support children's learning or whether they create unnecessary workload for practitioners.

Inclusion must remain at the heart of all curriculum decisions. Masendeke (2025) states that every child deserves access to high-quality learning experiences regardless of their background, abilities or individual circumstances. When implementing curriculum changes, practitioners should consider how provision can be adapted to support children with special educational needs and disabilities, children learning English as an additional language and those from diverse cultural backgrounds. Inclusive practice requires ongoing reflection and flexibility. Resources, environments and teaching approaches should be reviewed regularly to ensure they reflect and celebrate diversity. A curriculum that fails to recognise children's unique experiences may unintentionally create barriers to participation and engagement.

Conclusion

This assignment has critically examined the implementation of play-based curricula, the role of assessment and developmental models, and the practical considerations involved in curriculum development within early years settings. The discussion highlighted that while play-based curricula are widely recognised as beneficial for supporting children's holistic development, their implementation is often influenced by challenges relating to practitioner knowledge, school readiness pressures, resource limitations and inclusive practice. These factors demonstrate that delivering effective play-based learning requires more than simply valuing play; it requires skilled practitioners, supportive leadership and environments that enable children to learn through meaningful experiences. The assignment also explored the concept of the unique child and critically evaluated assessment, progress tracking and age-related developmental models within play-based curricula. Although observation-based assessment and progress tracking can provide valuable information about children's development, tensions exist between accountability requirements and child-centred

practice. Similarly, developmental models offer useful guidance but must be applied flexibly to avoid reducing children's complex and individual learning journeys to a series of predetermined milestones. Respecting the principle of the unique child requires practitioners to recognise that development is not always linear and that children learn in different ways and at different rates.

Finally, the professional blog emphasised the practical considerations involved in implementing curriculum change within early years settings. Successful curriculum development depends upon clear vision, practitioner confidence, effective leadership, strong partnerships with families and a commitment to inclusive practice. Curriculum change should not be viewed as a response solely to policy or inspection requirements but as an opportunity to enhance children's learning experiences and outcomes. Overall, the three sections demonstrate that play-based curricula remain highly relevant within contemporary early years education. However, their success depends upon practitioners' ability to balance educational expectations with children's individual needs. By maintaining a focus on the unique child, adopting meaningful assessment practices and approaching curriculum development reflectively, early years professionals can create learning environments that support every child to thrive, develop confidence and achieve their full potential.

Reference List

Archer, N. (2022) *Five arguments against a change to early years ratios*. Available at: <https://eyfs.info/articles.html/leadership-and-management/five-arguments-against-a-change-to-early-years-ratios-r390/> (Accessed: 8 June 2026).

Birth to 5 Matters (2026) *All about birth to 5 matters*. Available at: <https://birthto5matters.org.uk> (Accessed: 4 June 2026).

Brown, C. (2021) *How to develop a reflective practice*. Available at: <https://thinkingmuseum.com/2021/11/17/how-to-develop-a-reflective-practice/> (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Childcare & Education (2020) *The importance of listening to children*. Available at: <https://www.childcareeducationexpo.co.uk/news-article/the-importance-of-listening-to-children> (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Childcare Now (2025) *Why physical environment matters in childcare*. Available at: <https://childcarenow.ca/2025/02/19/why-physical-environment-matters-in-child-care-spotlight-report/> (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Connect childcare (2024) *Planning and observation in early years education*. Available at: <https://connectchildcare.com/blog/planning-and-observation-in-early-years-education/> (Accessed: 7 June 2026).

Early Years alliance (2026) *Advice and information*. Available at: <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk> (Accessed: 5 June 2026).

Early years Coalition. (2021) *Birth to 5 matters: Non-statutory guidance for early years foundation stage*. St Albans: Early Education. Available at: <https://birthto5matters.org.uk> (Accessed: 4 June 2026).

Foundation Years (2026) *The latest news, policy and resources for early years professionals*. Available at: <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk> (Accessed: 4 June 2026).

GOV.UK (2014) *Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2> (Accessed 4 June 2026).

GOV.UK (2017) *Development Matters*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2> (Accessed: 4 June 2026).

GOV.UK (2024) *SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 Years*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

GOV.UK (N.D) *Ofsted*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted> (Accessed: 7 June 2026).

Gowrie (2026) *Piaget's theory and the stages of cognitive development*. Available at: <https://www.gowriensw.com.au/thought-leadership/piaget-theory#:~:text=Both%20Piaget%20and%20Vygotsky%20saw,in%20a%20child's%20cognitive%20development>. (Accessed: 8 June 2026).

Hervatin, M. (2020) *Practical strategies of engaging g children in a practice setting*. Available at: <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/practical-strategies-for-engaging-children-in-a-practice-setting/#:~:text=A%20strengths%2Dbased%20approach%20is,Communities%20and%20Justice%2C%202019>). (Accessed: 8 June 2026).

HFL Education (2025) *Understanding staff to children's ratios in early years*. Available at <https://www.hfleducation.org/blog/understanding-staff-to-child-ratios-in-early-years-a-guide-for-maintained-schools-2025#:~:text=Staff%20to%20child%20ratios%20are,also%20fostering%20a%20nurturing%20atmosphere> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Masendeke, E. (2025) *Changing the national curriculum and assessment system for social justice*. Available at: <https://www.allfie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-now/inclusion-now-71/changing-the-national-curriculum-and-assessment-system-for-social-justice/> (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Mentally Health Schools (2026) *Peer pressure*. Available at: <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-information/peer-pressure/> (Accessed: 8 June 2026).

National Children's Bureau (2026) *Building brighter futures*. Available at: <https://www.ncb.org.uk> (Accessed: 5 June 2026).

Nursery world (2026) *Nursery World*. Available at: <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk> (Accessed: 5 June 2026).

Play England (2026) *Play England, Freedom to play*. Available at: <https://www.playengland.org.uk> (Accessed: 4 June 2026).

Soto-Icaza P, Aboitiz F, Billeke P. (2015) *Development of social skills in children: neural and behavioural evidence for the elaboration of cognitive models*. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4586412/> (Accessed: 6 June).

University of Cambridge (2022) *Prevention and early interventions to improve outcomes for children and families*. Available at: <https://www.csap.cam.ac.uk/prevention-and-early-intervention-improve-outcomes/> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).