

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) guidance has been created to support practitioners in taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy. The FAQ guide sits alongside '[Northern Alliance: Emerging Literacy Practice Guidance](#)'.

The FAQ guide has been organised into five themes based on the feedback from practitioners when taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy. The FAQ guide will be updated periodically to reflect the needs of practitioners.

Frequently Asked Questions

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The questions and associated answers within this guidance are suggestions based on ongoing dialogue with and feedback from practitioners.

Practitioners should use their professional judgement as to the needs of the learners in their environment.

1. Emerging Literacy – Theory and Rationale

What is Emerging Literacy?

Emerging Literacy has been created to support practitioners to effectively differentiate early literacy learning by matching the teaching and learning of literacy, language and communication to the needs of each child. Informed by the developmental knowledge of Educational Psychologists (EPs), Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Speech and Language Therapists (S<s), Emerging Literacy has classified the many foundational reading and writing skills into four key skill areas: concepts of print, oral language, phonological awareness and pre-handwriting.

Years of international research has identified foundational skill areas which predict literacy attainment, not just in the first year in school but into later primary and beyond. It is a simple fact that children come into school with a wide range of levels and security of these skills – some of which may be due to previous learning experience, but much is related to normal (biological) variation in development.

Taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy supports practitioners to identify the strengths and gaps of each learner within these key skill areas as well as providing planning support to address the identified skill gaps.

How to take a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy?

Schools who have taken a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy have prioritised the developmental knowledge of all staff to better outcomes for all children and young people.

Across the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy has supported children universally.

In Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) have promoted early literacy, language and communication skills through developmentally appropriate child initiated play experiences.

Within Primary 1 settings Class Teachers have used the assessment tools universally to identify strengths and gaps, addressing the foundational reading and writing skill gaps. Emerging Literacy supports Primary 1 practitioners to effectively differentiate their school's literacy framework, matching the teaching and learning to each learner.

Beyond the Early Level taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy has allowed for effective targeted support for children and young people. Teachers in Primary 2 and beyond have used the tools to identify strengths and gaps in the key early literacy skill areas, targeting the identified gaps to support each child on the school's literacy framework.

Additional Support Needs Teachers (ASNTs) have worked alongside class teachers to provide targeted support in addition to the universal support provided in the classroom to address the key early literacy skill gaps.

2. Emerging Literacy – Assessment

When do we begin the assessments?

In ELC settings across Highland ongoing monitoring of early literacy skills are documented in the [4 year old Developmental Overview](#). In addition to Highland, some of the other local authorities across the Northern Alliance are using these to support children in Early Learning and Childcare.

Across the Northern Alliance staff in ELC settings are integrating the Emerging Literacy key skill areas into child initiated play experiences. There should be no formal assessments for Emerging Literacy in ELC. Emerging Literacy key skills areas can be observed through play experiences.

If you are using the 4 year old Developmental Overview, it will transition from Nursery to Primary 1. When there are gaps in the Developmental Overview P1 teachers have found that setting up experiences in which children need to demonstrate the skills within the Developmental Overview as a useful observation process at the beginning of Primary 1 to inform their planning.

In Primary 1 teachers have found the process of completing the Phonological Awareness screen, observing the components of the Pre-Handwriting continuum and transferring this information onto the tracking documents for all children as a useful baseline of skills at P1 entry.

Beyond Primary 1 teachers have found the process of completing the Phonological Awareness screen, observing the components of the Pre-Handwriting continuum and transferring this information onto the tracking documents for identified children who are not making the expected progress, or have been identified as having persistent literacy difficulties, as providing an overview of the strengths and gaps in foundational reading and writing skills.

How do we organise assessments?

Schools who have taken a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy have prioritised the assessment process to identify the strengths and gaps of each child. Class Teachers have found conducting the assessment processes themselves has provided information not only on the strengths and gaps of each child in key skills, but also information on how each child approaches the demands of the assessment.

Phonological Awareness Screen

Schools who have taken a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy have seen Senior Management Teams (SMTs) and ASNTs providing support for Class Teachers to conduct the Phonological Awareness screen through releasing teachers from class to conduct the screen individually with children. In some schools teachers have been able to conduct the screen in a quiet space within the classroom through soft start.

Pre-Handwriting Overview

Class Teachers have found that the skills within the Pre-Handwriting continuum can be observed through setting up fine motor skills, scissor skills and pencil control (pre-writing) experiences within small groups. Class Teachers have found that the experiences can be set-up during soft start or during a focused literacy time. Teachers have found the observations can be completed directly onto the Pre-Handwriting Tracker.

3. Emerging Literacy – Planning

How does Emerging Literacy ‘fit’ as part of our school’s literacy framework?

A school’s literacy framework aims to develop the literacy, language and communication skills in children and young people. Experience shows that for literacy learning a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach benefits some, holds some back and leaves some behind. There is also a risk that children can “do” the phonics and make recognisable letters in P1/2, but without sufficiently secure foundations, their literacy skills are vulnerable to the increased demands of later learning – this is part of the explanation of the well-known dip in attainment in later primary.

The Emerging Literacy approach is intentionally designed to be compatible with any programme, with one proviso; it is not itself a programme (in the “do this, then do this” sense), but instead a series of supports and resources for reflective teaching so that teachers can work out what to do for a given class – which is likely to be different to a previous class or a class next door. What this does mean is that teachers are supported to use their judgements about the timing and pacing of phonics and handwriting instruction – so that those able to forge ahead are suitably challenged, and those children who need it can work to secure foundational skills for later attainment.

How do we use the assessment information to plan for learning?

Teachers have found that once the initial assessments have been completed and the information has been added to the tracking sheets, analysing the tracking sheets allows for teachers to plan experiences which are matched to the learning needs of each child.

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to planning. In some schools they may identify that they need to do work on developing the tripod grasp with the majority of their children, in another school they may find that they have got a group who have secure pencil control and a group who have yet to develop a tripod grasp. Through analysis of the tracking sheets, teachers can plan their experiences based on the information which is available through assessment information. This may mean that teachers are working with a whole cohort, a small group or an individual for different areas of early literacy development.

When do we re-assess?

The screening tools and trackers have been created to support practitioners in their professional judgement when differentiating the early literacy, language and communication experiences of school years children.

Schools have found it most beneficial to gathering the information initially for Phonological Awareness through the screen and Pre-Handwriting through observations, with subsequent assessments only assessing the areas in which gaps were identified in earlier assessments:

e.g. If a child has an identified gap in ‘Word Boundaries’ in Phonological Awareness, following a block of learning in ‘Word Boundaries’ the teacher can assess to see if the child is secure in this area through using the ‘Word Boundaries’ part of the screen. This information could then be updated on the Phonological Awareness tracker.

4. Emerging Literacy – Resources

What resources do we need?

The [‘Northern Alliance: Emerging Literacy – Where to Start?’](#) guide for practitioners includes links to the Emerging Literacy resources to support the development of the four key skill areas. This includes the resources to support assessment, tracking and learning activities. The [Emerging Literacy Training Videos](#) provide an overview of the available resources.

In addition to the resources which have been created and published on the Highland Literacy Blog, there are additional suggestions which practitioners have found supportive in taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy.

Schools who have taken a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy have prioritised the creation and sharing of resources among colleagues to support all children who benefit from developing foundational literacy skills.

Concepts of Print

Schools have ensured that they have a selection of texts which children find interesting and engaging. Schools have been encouraged to connect with their local Network Librarian.

Oral Language

Schools have used the [Words Up Key Message Videos](#) and [‘Building Vocabulary for Better Literacy’](#) resources to support the development of Oral Language across the school.

Phonological Awareness

Schools have found the creation of resource boxes for each of the stages of the phonological awareness continuum including the activity suggestions (and any other relevant resources which they have available) as a useful support resource when planning and delivering on areas of phonological awareness.

Pre-Handwriting

ELC settings and schools have found that centralising the resources which promote the development of fine motor skills, scissor skills and pencil control (pre-writing) skills allows for practitioners to effectively plan for, provide access to and deliver pre-handwriting experiences. The handouts available on the Pre-Handwriting page detail inexpensive things which centres and schools may already have, things which may be in the home environment and things which can be purchased for a small price.

5. Emerging Literacy – Family Learning

How do we share Emerging Literacy with families?

Schools who have taken a whole-school approach to Emerging Literacy have developed approaches to family learning so that families understand how taking a developmental approach to Emerging Literacy can support each and every child. Schools have found it useful to share:

- the “Why?” of Emerging Literacy
- the foundational reading and writing skills which impact on later attainment
- how families can support at home.

The [Emerging Literacy Family Learning Resource](#) has been created to support schools when working with families. Schools have delivered this through Nursery/Primary 1 transition events, literacy workshops, soft start learning together sessions and using the activities that are being developed in class as home learning activities.