



## Early Identification to Reduce the Negative Impacts of Developmental Variations

### Executive Summary

**Developmental profiling** is a universal, classroom-based approach that uses an evidenced based assessment tool to map and compare key areas of a young child's development, such as sensory processing, auditory skills, and coordination, at the point of school entry. By capturing this information early, when the brain is most adaptable, educators can provide timely, targeted support that aligns with each child's unique developmental needs.

**This proactive strategy reduces risk** of educational disadvantage, anxiety, and disengagement by ensuring that support is guided by a comprehensive understanding of the whole child. Crucially, it enables nearly all Reception-aged children to be profiled without the need for external referrals or specialist involvement, helping to identify needs before they escalate.

By embedding developmental profiling at the start of formal education, schools can **shift from reactive**, often costly interventions to **early, effective support**, laying stronger foundations for learning, inclusion, and long-term outcomes.

### Policy Recommendations

#### 1. Implement Comprehensive

##### **Development Profiling at School Entry:**

Schools should adopt the evidenced based Early Action Compass, a Development Profiling Tool (DPT) to

assess seven important aspects of child development upon entry. This will ensure early identification of developmental delays, differences and variations, allowing for timely and targeted intervention.

#### 2. Harness the Expertise of Early Years

##### **Foundation Stage (EYFS) Teachers:**

EYFS teachers, highly skilled in observing young children's development, are best placed to administer the Development Profiling Tool (DPT). Their professional insight helps reduce observer bias, where unconscious expectations may influence what is seen, ensuring more accurate and consistent profiling. Their involvement also deepens their understanding of developmental pathways, enabling them to play a more active role in identifying emerging needs, contributing to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) referrals, and easing the demand on paediatric healthcare services.

#### 3. Support Targeted Intervention for

##### **Developmental Delays:**

After profiling children's developmental differences, schools should receive funding to resource and implement targeted intervention. This proactive approach ensures timely and effective support, helping children meet their potential by addressing specific needs early on.

## From Profiling to Progress:

Children identified through developmental profiling as having emerging needs, such as sensory, perception, or coordination difficulties, are often those at greater risk of being classified with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and of not being "school ready" by the time they enter Reception. Without early identification and support, these children are more likely to struggle with foundational learning, leading to poor performance in assessments and reduced engagement with education over time. This disengagement significantly increases the likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) by ages 16–17. The urgency of this issue has grown in recent years: in 2022/2023, only 67% of children in the UK were considered school ready, with even lower rates among children eligible for free school meals (52%), boys (61%), and some ethnic groups. Regional disparities were also evident.

## Evidence Based

The Development Profiling Tool (DPT) was developed and validated through both a pilot and a large-scale trial, profiling the development of over 500 children at school entry. By identifying developmental differences early, the tool enabled timely, targeted support, strengthening school readiness and laying the foundation for more equitable learning outcomes.

## What Makes the DPT Different?

The Development Profiling Tool (DPT) offers a pioneering, whole-child approach to early assessment, measuring development across

seven key constructs. Unlike narrower tools, the DPT provides rich, detailed profiles for nearly all children in Reception, ensuring that very few are missed. Its strength lies not only in what it measures, but in what it enables: by translating developmental insights into clear, targeted intervention pathways, the DPT empowers educators to respond early and effectively to each child's unique needs—before learning gaps widen.

*What do educators say about the tool?*

***'The development tool has opened our eyes beyond the curriculum to help children through tailored interventions.'***

***'The earlier we learn how a child learns and what barriers they have to learning, the earlier we can intervene.'***

***'I was able to use the assessment outcomes, in some cases with the whole class, which was incredibly helpful, particularly in guiding our support in gross and fine motor skills, as well as spatial awareness.'***

## Conclusion

The DPT gives every child a chance to be seen, understood, and supported from the very start. By acting early, we can change life trajectories—closing gaps before they widen and unlocking potential before it's lost.

## Contact

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