



Department
for Education

Early Years Stronger Practice Advisers (EYSPA) Programme

Group-Based Setting Application Support Pack

September 2026

Introduction

The Early Years Stronger Practice Adviser (EYSPA) programme is a new iteration of the Experts and Mentors programme, which focused on developing the skills of early years professionals to reduce the effects of Covid-19 on children's development.

The EYSPA programme will deliver targeted support to leaders in eligible settings to boost children's development, improve outcomes, and narrow the disadvantage gap. Delivered via the [Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs](#) (EYSPH), support will be open to group-based settings as well as childminder settings. EYSPAs will support selected settings and coach leaders in how to make improvements in their setting, with four group-based EYSPAs offering support for each of the 36 hubs.

If your group-based setting meets the eligibility criteria, please complete the attached application form. Please also inform your Local Authority you are applying for this support. If selected, you will be asked for more specific information via a diagnostic form which will support the hub in matching you to the best possible EYSPA.

EYSPAs are experienced early years leaders who work in either a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Ofsted rated setting and have experience of coaching other early years professionals and improving practice.

Selected settings will collaborate closely with their EYSPH, EYSPA and the DfE. EYSPAs will commit to supporting group-based settings face-to-face for a minimum of three days over a single term, with each selected setting receiving a maximum of one EYSPA support offer, unless the hub sees it appropriate for a setting to be supported more than once.

Eligibility Criteria

The programme's eligibility criteria ensure support is offered to the most appropriate settings. Settings will need to meet at least one of the below eligibility criteria:

Ofsted Inspection Grading:

A setting is eligible for support if it has received:

- A 'Needs attention' or 'Urgent improvement' grading in any area of its most recent Ofsted inspection under the [post-November 'report card' 2025 inspection framework](#)
- An overall grading of 'Inadequate' or 'Requires improvement' on the [pre-November 2025 Ofsted inspection framework](#).

The EYSPA will offer targeted support to improve areas for development highlighted in their most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Additional Eligibility Criteria:

Group and school-based settings will also be eligible if they have a significant number of children on roll:

- Eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium
- Eligible for the Early Learning for 2 Year Olds Offer
- With SEND needs and who qualify for support

Settings may meet more than one of the above criteria; hubs will collaborate with Local Authorities to agree on which settings would be best supported by an EYSPA.

Please be aware that the aim of the programme is to improve and strengthen practice and leadership, therefore applications which meet the **Ofsted eligibility requirements will be prioritised** for support over those who only meet the additional eligibility criteria.

Please be clear in your application which eligibility criteria(s) your setting meets; further details will be requested in the pre-support diagnostic form.

Completing the Application Form:

The Group-based application form is a Microsoft Form that will be sent to you by your local EY Stronger Practice Hub. Section one of the form consists of short form questions designed to get essential information about your setting e.g. Name, URN, contact details, address etc.

Please be aware information will only be reviewed by the hub, the assigned EYSPA (if successful) and the Department for Education and no information will be made publicly available.

Section two of the form focuses on understanding the programme eligibility criteria that your setting meets and the areas of your practice you'd like EYSPA support on. The form is designed to be quick and easy to complete, with more specific information being provided in the diagnostic form that will be sent to settings chosen for EYSPA support.

If you have any questions about the form when completing it, please contact your local EY Stronger Practice Hub in the first instance. For further support you can contact EYSPA.programme@education.gov.uk.

We look forward to receiving your application.