

Milestones to support learners with complex additional support needs

Literacy and English

March 2018

Education Scotland

Guidance on using milestones

Context

In 2017, Education Scotland published Benchmarks within all curriculum areas for Early through to Fourth level of Curriculum for Excellence. The purpose of these benchmarks was to provide clarity on the national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level setting out clear lines of progression. In addition, the intention was to make clear what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels and to support consistency in teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgements. Benchmarks are to be used to support teachers' professional judgement of achievement of a level.

Curriculum for Excellence aims to provide 'a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18 firmly focused on the needs of the child and young person.' Children and young people with complex additional support needs are a wide and varied group of learners who often require adaptations to the curriculum and a more nuanced understanding of how they learn in order to track their progression in a meaningful way. Many learners with complex additional support needs are likely to make expected progress within Early to Fourth level. However, for a number of these learners, tracking of progression will be at a pre-early level.

A number of schools and Education Authorities had already begun the process of developing their own curriculum milestones and progression frameworks to support the assessment of learners with complex additional support needs, many of whom were working at a pre-early level. In order to ensure consistency and to enable the tracking of progression for learners who require support to consolidate their knowledge, skills and competencies at a pre-early level, Education Scotland has produced this set of milestones and accompanying guidance to specifically support the assessment of learners with complex additional support needs.

The milestones and guidance are not intended to provide an alternative curriculum for children and young people with complex additional support needs and planning for learners with complex additional support needs should continue to be based on the Experiences and Outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence with personalisation where required.

What are 'complex additional support needs'?

Complex additional support needs may arise as result of:

- the severity of one or more factors resulting in need, and/or
- the combined impact of a number of separate factors, one or more of which may be severe.

A rigorous, clearly bounded and universally accepted definition is extremely difficult to formulate because of the multiplicity of factors and the impact of specific contexts in different local authorities. For that reason, the National Strategic Commissioning Group (NSCG)¹ is using a working **description** rather than a definition of children and young people with complex additional support needs. Whilst this supplies a broad definition of 'complex additional support needs', these milestones and accompanying guidance refer

¹ The Strategic Commissioning of National Services was proposed in the ['The Right Help in the Right Place at the Right Time'](#) An independent Strategic Review of Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs conducted by Peter Doran and published in November 2012.

more specifically to learners with *complex learning needs who are specifically working at a pre-early Level.*

Supporting communication needs

Many learners with complex additional support needs have limited or no verbal language. Therefore, practitioners will employ a range of strategies (dependent on the needs of individual learners) to support and enable understanding and communication. Use of on-body signing, manual signing, sensory cues, objects of reference, and visual supports such as photographs and symbols can enable learners to understand and anticipate.

Additionally, many learners will use Voice Output Communication Aid devices (VOCA) for expressive communication. These devices can range from very simple single message devices to high-tech devices such as tablet computers which use specialist apps and software. Learners with complex needs will access these devices in a number of ways through touch screens, assistive switches or eye tracker units. These methods of supporting communication are often referred to as 'Augmentative and Alternative Communication' (AAC).

When assessing learners' progress, staff should make use of and record any type of AAC or other support that facilitates learning.

For further information and support see: <http://www.callscotland.org.uk/home/>

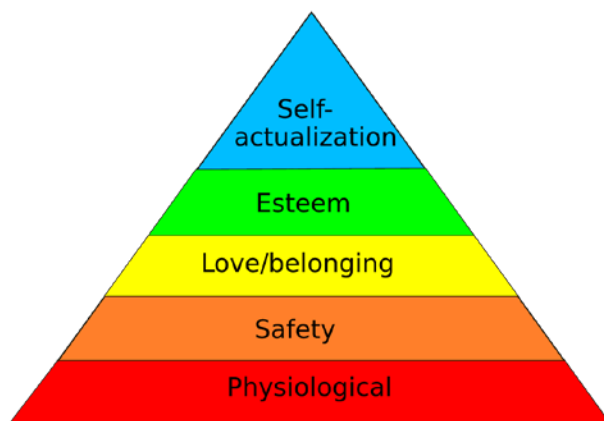
Key principles

A number of key principles are important to consider when tracking the progression of learners with complex additional support needs.

1. **A holistic view** of the learner must be taken. Learning may not always occur in discrete curriculum areas and it may be necessary to carry out integrated learning in order to determine whether a particular milestone has been achieved in a particular curriculum area.
2. Learners' progression should be viewed in the context of **the optimum learning environment** for them. This requires a practitioner to have a clear understanding of the learners' needs to adapt the environment to meet these needs effectively. Supportive interactions will also be likely to form part of the optimum learning environment for a child or young person.
3. There should be a focus on what the learner can do, not what they can't. Progress may be made in very small steps. **Success should be celebrated** and shared where possible.
4. Learning must be **relevant and purposeful** and built on previous experiences. Taking account of interests and preferences will help engage and motivate the learner.
5. Assessment should take account of the **complex interaction between the different aspects of the learners' needs** including medical, sensory, physical, communication and learning needs.

Theoretical frameworks to support understanding of learners with complex additional support needs

In order to support learners with complex additional support needs, practitioners require both an understanding of the curriculum and typical development. The atypical development of some learners with complex additional support needs means that they will not always progress through their learning in a linear or straightforward way. Practitioners will require an in-depth knowledge of children and young people with whom they work to ensure that they are able to identify development and progression when it occurs. They will also need to recognise the key part that the learning environment and interactions will play in determining the progression of this group of learners. Whilst this is an important facet for all children and young people, it is particularly vital in understanding the progression of these learners.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the basic needs that apply to all learners. For learners with complex health and care needs, careful consideration should be given to planning in order to meet these needs whilst maximising opportunities for learning.²

There are several pathways of learning, drawn from a theoretical understanding of development, which can inform understanding when working with learners at very early stages of development. Please note that this is intended only to *signpost practitioners and not as an extensive outline of the theoretical frameworks highlighted*. These include:

Stages	Key messages
Habituation Early associative learning leading to classical conditioning Operant conditioning ³	Learners show a change in a response to a stimulus Learners anticipate and make associations between events Learners start to recognise that their action has a consequence
Acquisition Fluency Maintenance Generalisation	Learners acquire new responses Learners reach a level of mastery Learners consolidate and maintain a high level of competency Learners achieve mastery in different settings or contexts
Application or adaptation ⁴	Learners recognise similarities and apply in new situations
Pre-intentional communication Voluntary communication	Learners show involuntary/reflexive responses Learners imitate and react to situations

² Diagram adapted from Maslow, A.H (1943) 'A Theory of Human Motivation' *Psychological Review*. **50** (4): 370–96.

³ Pavlov, I. P. (1928). *Lectures on conditioned reflexes*. (Translated by W.H. Gantt) London: Allen and Unwin

⁴ Haring, N.G., Lovitt, T.C., Eaton, M.D., & Hansen, C.L. (1978). *The fourth R: Research in the classroom*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.

Unconventional communication	Learners communicate intentionally but in unconventional ways
Conventional communication ⁵	Learners use gesture or vocalisation to communicate intentionally
Sensorimotor	Learning is based on motor activity and physical interaction. Object permanence develops at this stage.
Pre-operational	Learners are beginning to use symbols and words to represent objects as their memory and imagination develop
Concrete operational	Learners begin to develop logical thinking and can work things out in their own heads
Formal operational ⁶	Learners can think abstractly and test hypotheses

When practitioners are considering the progression of the learners, they should take into account the stages of development outlined above. For example, when noting whether a milestone has been reached, it may be necessary to consider whether a child has simply *acquired* a new skill or knowledge, whether they are *fluent* in using this skill or knowledge and whether they can *generalise* it or *apply it in different and new situations*.

Finally, a recognition of the work of **Vygotsky**⁷ and an understanding of the zone of proximal development, i.e. the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with adult help, is useful. The interaction between an adult and learner is a key factor that will facilitate progression. A skilled communication partner who is sensitive to the learner and can scaffold their learning, can impact on their ability to progress.

Milestones

The terminology of ‘**milestones**’ is used throughout this guidance and progression frameworks for a number of reasons. Milestones are *important points in development* and demonstrate progression. Pre-early level is not defined within Curriculum for Excellence. However, learners who are not able to achieve any of the benchmarks within early level still require tracking and monitoring of their progression. Many of these learners will move on to work at early level but some learners will continue to make progress at this pre-early stage. A number of other progression frameworks developed in other national contexts and within local authorities in Scotland have also used milestones as a means of tracking progression. It is hoped that the use of the milestones will support a more learner-centred approach which celebrates the differences of all learners, recognising that whilst there are individualised milestones that children and young people with complex additional support needs may move through, these are by no means all necessary aspects of progression.

Purpose of milestones

The milestones aim to support practitioners to identify the progression of learning. An important aspect of this work is to take account of the different ways in which learners with complex additional support needs engage with their learning and the levels of support required to do so. Milestones do not capture every aspect of a learners’ progression, but can be used to guide practitioners in their assessment and moderation of a learner and to

⁵ Rowland, C. (2013). *Communication Matrix for parents and professionals*. Oregon Health and Science University.

⁶ Piaget, J. (1936). *Origins of intelligence in the child*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

⁷ Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

track a learners' progress. The tables below will help practitioners to gauge the level of engagement for individual learners and determine their level of progress.

Milestones are designed to support practitioners to recognise progression in learning but should not be used as a checklist. Further discussion and moderation activities will support a shared understanding of these milestones and support practitioners' consistent use of the milestones.

Milestones should be used to support learners who are working at a pre-early level in all school settings. However, milestones should not be used to track progression of typically developing children in early learning and childcare settings.

Structure

The structure of the document is similar to the Benchmarks documents. All of the milestones, except the foundation milestones, are organised into curriculum areas and linked to the Organisers and Experiences and Outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Whilst planning activities continues to be based on the Experiences and Outcomes from CfE, the milestones provide an illustration of progression for learners with complex additional support needs at pre-early level.

In addition, some of the earliest milestones focus on early communication, cognitive and sensory skills and form the foundation of all learning. These are outlined in a separate table entitled Foundation of Learning Milestones. The milestones within the foundations of learning and the curriculum areas are set out in terms of their progression. However, it is not expected that every learner will pass through every milestone as they make progress. Some milestones may not be achievable for some learners. It may also be the case children and young people with degenerative conditions that they may not show progression, and lose milestones they have achieved.

In addition to making progression from one milestone to another, learners may also make progress within each individual milestone. The continuum of engagement and the types of support detailed below allow practitioners to understand the breadth and depth of learning which may be undertaken by the learner.

Continuum of Engagement

The following continuum outlines broad forms of engagement which learners may go through in their learning. When undertaking assessment of progress through milestones, practitioners should take account of the following forms of engagement as this will provide additional information as to whether the milestone has been fully achieved. The level of a learner's engagement can vary considerably across different aspects of learning. Practitioners should work together to moderate their understanding of these forms of engagement with a consideration of the specific needs of learners.

Experiences	Encounters	Learner is present during an activity or experience
	Notices	Learner appears to be aware of what is happening around him(er)
	Shows interest	Learner demonstrates some interest in people, events or objects

Actively Engages	Responds	Learner attends and begins to give reactions to show that he/she can tell the difference between people, events or objects
	Focuses attention	Learner demonstrates more consistent attention and shows a clear distinction between specific people, events or objects
	Participates actively	Learner begins to be proactive in his(er) interactions with people, events and objects. He/she anticipates familiar sequence of events
	Initiates	Learner initiates activities and interactions more regularly and respond to options and choices
Applies and extends	Demonstrates understanding	Learner demonstrates his(er) understanding and skills in a specific learning setting
	Consolidates	Learner recalls previous learning and can use it in familiar situations.
	Extends	Learner becomes more confident in his(er) learning and can apply skills in a range of unfamiliar settings.

Types of Support

When supporting learners with complex additional support needs to access the curriculum, it is important for practitioners to take account of the additional physical, communicative, sensory and cognitive barriers to learning which the children and young people may experience.

The following table outlines the broad types of support that may be provided to a learner when assessing progress. When progress is being recorded or shared with others, it can be helpful to include types of support provided. Practitioners should determine what level of support is required in their setting.

Type of support	Examples of support
Physical support	Hand over hand, use of equipment
Gestural support	Simple signs or gesture, pointing, demonstrating
Visual support	Using objects, photos, pictures, symbols
Verbal support	Prompting and cues, expectant pause
Support via technology	Use of switches, apps, communication aids
No support	No support required

Pre-early level Foundation Milestones

The milestones below should be considered alongside the levels of engagement and types of support which are required to help learners demonstrate progression in the milestones.

Area of focus	Milestones
Attention skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows a simple reflex response to an individual stimulus. • Shows a simple reflex response to a range of stimuli, objects, people and activities. • Shows awareness of something happening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gives a quick and fleeting response ○ Gives inconsistent response ○ Gives more consistent attention and response. • Gives shared attention to a range of stimuli, objects, people and activities. • Anticipates within familiar routines and situations. • Shares a consistent response in familiar routines and situations. • Shows understanding of a sequence of activities within a familiar routine. • Demonstrates extended attention within familiar settings. • Demonstrates extended attention within unfamiliar settings.
Communicating preference and choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows pleasure/displeasure through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-verbal or physical response ○ Verbal response. • Accepts or rejects in response to concrete stimuli, objects, people and activities. • Indicates preferences in response to concrete stimuli, objects, people and activities. • Consistently shows and expresses preference to stimuli, objects, people and activities. • Communicates basic needs enabling them to be understood by others, e.g. more/again/finished/enough/stop. • Makes a choice using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Real objects ○ Photos ○ Symbols.
Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows awareness of people and activities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tolerates other people within their space.</i> • <i>Demonstrates a clear reaction to people and activities.</i> • <i>Responds to facial expressions and/or body language.</i> • <i>Shows a response to a social interaction with familiar people and activities.</i> • <i>Shows a response to a social interaction with unfamiliar people and activities.</i> • <i>Imitates, during interactions, using vocalisations and/or body movements.</i> • <i>Initiates an interaction with a familiar person or in a familiar situation.</i> • <i>Initiates an interaction with an unfamiliar person or in an unfamiliar situation.</i> • <i>Takes turns in an interaction with a familiar person or in a familiar situation.</i> • <i>Take turns in an interaction with unfamiliar people and/or unfamiliar settings.</i>
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notices stimuli.</i> • <i>Follows/tracks stimuli when they move.</i> • <i>Looks around for disappearing stimuli.</i> • <i>Explores toys and objects.</i> • <i>Shows preference for toys and objects.</i> • <i>Recognises that repeated actions lead to a particular effect (cause and effect).</i>

Pre-early level Literacy and English

Pre-early level - Listening and talking

	Curriculum Organisers	Experiences and Outcomes for planning learning, teaching and assessment	Milestones to support practitioners' professional judgement
Listening and talking	<p>Enjoyment and choice - within a motivating and challenging environment developing an awareness of the relevance of texts in my life.</p>	<p>I enjoy exploring and playing with patterns and sounds of language, and can use what I learn. <i>LIT 0-01a/LIT 0-11a/LIT 0-20a</i></p> <p>I enjoy exploring and choosing stories and other texts to watch, read and listen to, and can share my likes and dislikes. <i>LIT 0-01b/LIT 0-11b</i></p> <p>I enjoy exploring events and characters in stories and other texts, sharing my thoughts in different ways. <i>LIT 0-01c</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows a response to familiar characters, songs, rhymes and/or stories • Generates meaningful vocalisations in response to familiar stimuli, objects, people and/or activities • Demonstrates likes or dislikes for characters, songs, rhymes and/or stories • Anticipates and responds to known events in familiar texts, songs, rhymes and/or stories • Joins in with actions, signs and/or movements relating to familiar texts, songs, rhymes and stories
	<p>Tools for listening, talking and communicating - to help me when interacting or presenting within and beyond my place of learning.</p>	<p>As I listen and talk in different situations, I am learning to take turns and am developing my awareness of when to speak and when to listen. <i>LIT 0-02a/ENG 0-03a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds consistently to routines which are spoken or written • Identifies named objects, pictures or symbols consistently • Listens and responds to different words and phrases appropriately • Can use single words to communicate • Can use a few words together to communicate • Uses short phrases to communicate • Shows awareness of others in a conversation • Demonstrates an awareness of others by

			<p>taking a turn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joins in with a conversation using a preferred mode of communication • Uses sentences to communicate • Responds to simple questions by non-verbal or verbal means
	<p>Finding and using information -when listening to, watching and talking about texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures and specialist vocabulary.</p>	<p>I listen or watch for useful or interesting information and I use this to make choices or learn new things.</p> <p><i>LIT 0-04a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and responds to objects, pictures, symbols and/or key words from a familiar story, song or rhyme • Makes a choice between a few objects, characters, songs, rhymes and/or stories based on information presented to them
	<p>Understanding analysing and evaluating -investigating and/or appreciating text with increasingly complex ideas, structures and specialist vocabulary for different purposes.</p>	<p>To help me understand stories and other texts, I ask questions and link what I am learning with what I already know.</p> <p><i>LIT 0-07a/LIT 0-16a/ ENG 0-17a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to repetitive words in a story or text • Anticipates repetitive words in familiar stories or rhymes • Responds to repetitive elements within stories • Recognises omissions and alterations to familiar song, rhyme, story or text • Recalls some aspects of a song, rhyme, story and/or text

	<p>Creating texts - applying the elements others use to create different types of short and extended texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures and vocabulary.</p>	<p>Within real and imaginary situations, I share experiences and feelings, ideas and information in a way that communicates my message. <i>LIT 0-09a</i></p> <p>I enjoy exploring events and stories and other texts and I use what I learn to invent my own, sharing these with others in imaginative ways. <i>LIT 0-09b/LIT 0-31a</i></p> <p>As I learn and take part in conversations and discussion, I discover new words and phrases which I use to help me express my ideas, thoughts and feelings. <i>LIT 0-10a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate that they can follow pattern, sequence in a song, rhyme, story or text by joining in • Shares a familiar experience demonstrating some awareness of sequence and structure • Expresses ideas through different types of play • Creates imaginary characters, rhymes and/or stories and communicates these to others • Begins to identify new vocabulary and can use this to convey their ideas, thoughts and feelings • Creates a text using an alternative method, e.g. photographs, symbols, etc.
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Pre-early level Literacy and English

Pre-early level - Reading

	Curriculum Organisers	Experiences and Outcomes for planning learning, teaching and assessment	Milestones to support practitioners' professional judgement
Reading	<p>Enjoyment and choice - within a motivating and challenging environment developing an awareness of the relevance of texts in my life.</p>	<p>I enjoy exploring and playing with the patterns and sounds of language and can use what I learn. <i>LIT 0-01a/LIT 0-11a/LIT 0-20a</i></p> <p>I enjoy exploring and choosing stories and other texts to watch, read or listen to, and can share my likes and dislikes. <i>LIT 0-01b/LIT 0-11b</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows an interest in rhymes, stories and/or text • Shows an interest and makes a choice of a familiar rhyme, story and/or text • Anticipates or reacts to parts of rhyme, story and/or text • Awareness of conventions of handling a storybook or text for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Turning a page ○ Left to right ○ Holding book right way up ○ Identifying front and back of a book ○ Knowing the difference between a picture and text • Explores a storybook or text in order to find objects, pictures and/or words
	<p>Tools for reading - to help me use texts with increasingly complex or unfamiliar ideas, structures and vocabulary within and beyond my place of learning</p>	<p>I explore sounds, letters and words, discovering how they work together and I can use what I learn to help me as I read and write. <i>ENG 0-12a/LIT 0-13a/LIT 0-21a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises when a story starts and finishes • Matches objects, photos, pictures, symbols and/or text • Sorts objects, photos, pictures, symbols and/or text • Demonstrates an awareness that symbols and print carry meaning, e.g.

Listening and talking

by pretending to read the print

	<p>Finding and using information - when reading and using fiction and nonfiction texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures and specialist vocabular</p>	<p>I use signs, books or other texts to find useful or interesting information and I use this to plan, make choices or learn new things.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>LIT 0-14a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scans and tracks symbols and/or pictures • Makes a choice using symbols and/or pictures • Recognises and begins to read social sight words • Recognises familiar words and/or names • Recognises some familiar words in a storybook or text • Comments on some ideas within a story and/or text • Gives a response to a simple question about a text
	<p>Understanding, analysing and evaluating - investigating and/or appreciating fiction and non-fiction texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures and specialist vocabulary for different purposes</p>	<p>To help me understand stories and other texts, I ask questions and link what I am learning with what I already know.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>LIT 0-07a/LIT 0-16a/ENG 0-17a</i></p> <p>I enjoy events and characters in stories and other texts, sharing my thoughts in different ways.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>LIT 0-19a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises a character/object in a picture • Identifies an object/character within a story that is read to them • Recalls a character, object or event in a story that is read to them • Sequences parts of a story • Makes simple comments/responses or asks questions about a story • Responds to a simple question about a story or text

Pre-early level Literacy and English

Pre-early level - Writing

	Curriculum Organisers	Experiences and Outcomes for planning learning, teaching and assessment	Milestones to support practitioners' professional judgement
Writing	<p>Enjoyment and Choice - within a motivating and challenging environment developing and awareness of the relevance of texts in my life</p>	<p>I enjoy exploring and playing with the patterns and sounds of language and can use what I learn. <i>LIT 0-01a/LIT 0-11a/LIT 0-20a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacts with a range of objects using different senses • Shows an interest in print through exploring different ways that print is presented, e.g. shopping lists, cards, posters • Shows an interest in making marks • Experiments with mark making through different media • Produces specific mark making such as scribbles • Recognises that the function of writing is to convey meaning
	<p>Tools for writing - using knowledge of technical aspects to help my writing communicate effectively within and beyond my place of learning</p>	<p>I explore sounds, letters and words, discovering how they work together, and I can use what I learn to help me as I read or write. <i>ENG 0-12a/LIT 0-13a/LIT 0-21a</i></p> <p>As I play and learn, I enjoy exploring interesting materials for writing and different ways of recording my experiences and feelings, ideas and information. <i>LIT 0-21b</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates arm and/or hand movements and/or alternative method e.g. Assistive Technology during tactile, digital and/or multi-sensory activities • Demonstrates ability to hold, grasp and release tools for writing • Demonstrates control of preferred tool for writing in order to create patterns and sequences that convey meaning • Uses fingers, hands and other media

			<p>or tools to overwrite pre-written shapes and words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies shapes and letter forms • Demonstrates preferred hand to hold tools for writing
	<p>Organising and using information - considering texts to help create short and extended texts for different purposes</p>	<p>Within real and imaginary situations, I share experiences and feelings, ideas and information in a way that communicates my messages.</p> <p><i>LIT 0-26a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces marks/drawings that they are able to share as having a meaning • Produce meaningful marks that convey their own name • Looks at/explores objects, photos or pictures from a personal/shared experience • Uses objects, photos, pictures or other media to share feelings, ideas and information about a recent experience • Uses objects, photos, pictures or symbols in sequence to create a story or a message • Uses photograph/name card to label their own work • Conveys a message/idea/information using their preferred mode of communication

	<p>Creating texts - applying the elements which writer use to create different types of short and extended texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures and vocabulary</p>	<p>I enjoy exploring events and characters in stories and other texts and I use what I learn to invent my own, sharing these with others in imaginative ways. <i>LIT 0-9b/LIT0-31a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groups letters and leaves spaces between words• Uses familiar stories/characters to invent/create a story stories objects, photos, pictures or symbols in sequence – doesn't make sense• Begins to create a short piece of functional writing using objects, photos, pictures or symbols
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