

A third of pupils aged five 'can't count to 10'

TOO many children are still starting school without the basic skills they need to be able to learn, the head of Ofsted warned yesterday.

Sir Michael Wilshaw said that a 'significant minority' of youngsters across the country are 'simply not ready' for lessons.

More than a third continue to struggle to do simple tasks such as count to ten, write simple words or take turns speaking in class amid a shortage of 'high quality' provision.

Around two-fifths of all early years settings such as nurseries and childminders - 5,361 - are 'not improving fast enough to give children the best start in life, including the skills they need to be ready for school'.

They have remained 'satisfactory' since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008

'Arriving at school wearing nappies'

which sets out what is expected of pre-school and reception children, according to Ofsted's report.

Last year, teachers warned that rising numbers of children were arriving at school still wearing nappies while others were struggling to speak properly.

Sir Michael yesterday insisted that 'satisfactory' provision was not effective enough to 'close the attainment gap sufficiently quickly'.

The report - Getting It Right First Time - quotes 2012 Department for Education figures showing that 36 per cent of children start formal learning without a 'good level of development'.

Children are supposed to be able to count reliably to ten, use language such as 'circle' or 'bigger' to describe shapes and sizes, interact with classmates and take turns to talk and show basic control of objects and tools by the time they start full-time

By Sarah Harris

school. But 34 per cent of five-year-olds do not have a good level of communication, language or literacy. Among children from poorer areas, the figure rises to more than four in ten.

Fifteen per cent of five-year-old boys in England cannot write their own name or short words like 'cat' or 'dog', compared with eight per cent of girls.

Some eight per cent of boys cannot count up to ten, compared with five per cent of girls.

Sir Michael said the best nurseries and childminders 'ensure children are given clear routines and procedures that help build self-assurance'.

He added that 'their staff are highly skilled adults who improve the vocabulary, cognitive and social skills of very young children, particularly when they are not able to gain them at home'.

He published examples of childminders and nurseries that are managing to bring youngsters up to scratch using imaginative methods.

A childminder in West Berkshire uses a 'superhero skills school' to engage young boys in their learning.

At Newstead children's centre, Barnet, north London, adults and children come together for 'tea club' - an opportunity to evaluate the experiences of that day. Southwater village hall pre-school in West Sussex encourages children to use money and real china cups.

The Ofsted report says: 'In the snack area, children spend a very long time selecting their choices and paying for their order with real money.'

'As well as deciding when and what to eat, they are also learning about numbers and money in realistic situations.'

Others placed a high value on training, with one sending staff on trips to countries as far as Denmark and Italy to learn from the best nurseries.

s.harris@dailymail.co.uk

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