

Observation, Assessment, and Planning

EYFS Statutory Assessment

The Early Years Profile is to remain statutory for the time being. However, following the decision to abandon on-entry assessment of children entering reception classes last year there has now been a consultation: *Primary Assessment in England* which invited views about the perceived need for a form of baseline assessment. And, not unexpectedly this was endorsed so, it is now in the offing. Meanwhile, the government is to review its approach to the early assessment of young children, focusing on PSED, PD and C&L together with mathematics and literacy – possibly abandoning assessment of EAD and UW – as predicted in the last chapter of *Facilitating Learning in the EYFS* (2014).

Partnership with Parents

We know that when parents and practitioners in the early years work together what a direct impact it has on children's development and learning. Both partners have much to learn from one another and a great deal to share with each other. Working together to really understand and meet a child's individual needs begins with valuing and respecting the different roles that each partner plays. It is a process that involves sharing information and skills and building relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Open two-way communication is vital to make sure that knowledge and expertise are shared between partners. Central to all partnerships is the child who remains the priority.

Observing what children can do

Observation is referred to in several places in the revised Early Years Foundation Stage. Put simply observation is the practice of looking at and listening to children to find out how they are developing, what they like doing and what they are learning through their play and the experiences on offer. It is important that parents and practitioners share what they know about these three things so that they can decide whether the child's development is at the

expected stage, whether the resources such as toys and equipment are suitable for the child and to focus them on what to provide in future to support the child to develop new interests, learn new skills and acquire new knowledge.

Observations of children are vital. Because each child has a unique set of abilities and talents, observations in different situations capture these first hands. The starting point is always with the child. Observing what children choose to do, what their interests are and who and what resources they enjoy playing with, provides adults with reliable information about children as individuals. The Observing What a Child is learning approach in the Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage document can support developing systematic observations. Observation also provides opportunities to gauge children's needs and so more accurately plan the next steps in their learning. Observations take place on a regular basis as part of daily routines. Discussing these with the child, their parents and team members give a starting point for a holistic approach that will ensure that the child is always central to what is planned.

Assessment

Assessment in the EYFS is of two main types – **on-going assessment** which is what practitioners do on a daily basis to make decisions about what the child has learned or can do already so as to help the child move on in their learning – this is sometimes called 'formative' assessment because it informs the next steps that are planned with the child and the parent. Another type of assessment known as 'summative' assessment takes place twice in the Revised EYFS. Firstly when a child is between 24 and 36 months – outcomes of this assessment are recorded and parents and practitioners use the information gained to identify a child's strengths and their learning needs; the second assessment takes place towards the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage when children are in the final term of the reception class. This 'sums up' all the different information from on-going assessments that have been made about the child. This information is added to a record of children's achievement which is related to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) – showing the levels different children have achieved in the seven areas of learning and development in the Revised EYFS. NB: The EYFSP is **not a test**.

How the EYFSP works and what the levels or scores mean

The EYFS Profile summarises and describes children's attainment at the end of the EYFS. It is based on on-going observation and assessment in the three prime and four specific areas of learning, and the three learning characteristics, set out below:

The prime areas of learning:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development

The specific areas of learning:

- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

The learning characteristics:

- playing and exploring
- active learning
- creating and thinking critically

A completed EYFS Profile consists of 20 items of information: the attainment of each child is assessed in relation to each of the 17 Early Learning Goals descriptors, (ELGs) together with a short narrative describing the child's ways of learning expressed in terms of the three characteristics of learning. For each ELG, practitioners will judge whether a child is meeting the level of development expected at the end of the Reception Year (expected), exceeding this level (exceeding), or not yet reaching this level (emerging).

'The EYFS Profile is not intended to be used for on-going assessment or for entry-level assessment for Early Years settings or Reception classes'.

The primary purpose of the EYFS Profile is to provide a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of individual children at the end of the EYFS.

The primary uses of EYFS Profile data which have informed the development of the Profile are as follows.

- To inform parents about their child's development against the ELGs and the characteristics of their learning.
- To support a smooth transition to Key Stage 1 by informing the professional dialogue between EYFS and Key Stage 1 teachers.
- To help Year 1 teachers plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet the needs of all children.

In addition, the Department considers that a secondary purpose of the assessment is to provide an accurate national data set relating to levels of child development at the end of the EYFS which can be used to monitor changes in levels of children's development and their readiness for the next phase of their education both nationally and locally (school-level results are not to be published in the Performance Tables).

Planning

Planning in the early years is about meeting young children's needs so that they can play and learn happily in ways which will help them develop skills and knowledge across the Prime and Specific areas of learning in the EYFS. Planning is different from school to school and from setting to setting because each one is different from the next for all sorts of reasons. However, some settings and schools will plan certain things in a similar way – these might be events that are planned every year such as a visit to a farm where the children will be able to see and feed the lambs and perhaps help the farmer to feed the goats. Or it may be that the setting or school has links with an orchestra that visits them regularly to work with a nursery or reception class, helping them to find out about several instruments and to listen to and join in some music-making or drama. In some ways these sorts of events provide a rhythm to the year – a pattern that is variable and flexible depending on many factors but is also fairly predictable – many people describe this as long term planning. Between long term planning and the experiences that are planned for children on a daily and weekly basis are the medium-term plans that are made to ensure that over six weeks or a half term certain areas of learning are addressed – for example focusing on particular stories to help children to think about 'friendship'. These type of plans need to be in place so that all the necessary resources such

as books and props can be gathered. However, all planning should be flexible and used as a guide rather than followed slavishly. The most important planning that is done is the short-term daily/weekly planning that arises from discussions with the children and their parents and is based around their current interests. The child whose Nana has come by train to visit for a few days will have much to talk and think about and may want to make something for 'Nana', just as will the child whose house is near a building site and who arrives full of excitement to talk about a huge crane she has seen on her way to school. This is the stuff of short-term planning – the fleeting but compelling interests of this child on this day.