

Guidance for Observation and Target Setting in Expressive Arts and Design (EYFS)

Ofsted Definition of Teaching in the Early Years:

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

6 Key Questions to ask when observing Expressive Arts and Design:

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
1	How does the teacher share artistic vocabulary and support children to think through their creative intentions?	For example, how does the teacher: • share terms used by artists, potters, musicians and dancers as children show interest? • support children with a strong intention in mind to think about what they want to create, the processes involved and the materials/resources needed?
2	How does the teacher help children notice change, cause and effect as they create?	For example, how does the teacher: • encourage children to notice changes in the properties of media as they transform (e.g. wet, dry, flaky, fixed) and talk about cause and effect? • encourage children to notice changes in movement and sound (e.g. louder/quieter, bigger/smaller)? • introduce new skills and techniques?
3	How are materials and resources organised to develop children's creative expertise over time?	For example, how does the teacher: • offer a wide range of music, movement, painting, sculpture and musical instruments used in different ways? • offer opportunities to encounter and revisit key materials?

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
		• create a safe place to keep work in progress? • supply open-ended props/materials that can be transformed in play? • know the children well enough to introduce sensory materials (e.g. paint, slime, clay) sensitively, being aware of individual sensitivities or preferences around touch and texture?
4	How does the teacher provide children with a wide range of experiences to stimulate their imagination?	For example, how does the teacher: • provide opportunities to experience the world outside the setting, e.g. walks, visits, visitors, links with home? • share a diverse range of text, image-based and oral stories to stimulate imaginative responses? • co-create and tell stories based on children's own ideas, experiences, people and places, as well as imaginary ones?
5	How does the teacher provide space, materials and time for children to develop and represent their imaginative ideas?	For example, how does the teacher: • create spaces for children to respond to stories and represent their ideas through a variety of art forms and materials? • offer a wide variety of materials and resources, indoors and outdoors, that stimulate imaginative play, building and representing? • make materials accessible so children can develop enquiries and ideas while still fresh, over extended periods of time? • ensure children are aware of the space around them, and that clothing, tools and resources are managed safely so children can explore and create with confidence?
6	How does the teacher recognise, support and celebrate children's individual imaginative expression?	For example, how does the teacher: • support children to gain confidence in their own way of representing and sharing ideas? • introduce descriptive language within the context of children's own imaginative experiences?

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
		celebrate children's imaginative ideas and creations, e.g. impromptu performances, learning journeys, display documentation, digital portfolios?

Potential Expressive Arts and Design Specific Targets on Lesson Analysis Forms.

Lesson design and delivery, including sequencing and choice of teaching methods Next Steps:
Plan opportunities to introduce and model artistic, musical or movement vocabulary during creative activities.
Provide open-ended materials and props, indoors and outdoors, that children can transform in their imaginative play.
Plan visits, walks or visitors that give children new experiences to draw on for creating and imaginative play.
Build in extended, uninterrupted time and a safe space for children to revisit and develop creative work over more than one session.
Plan how you will introduce a new skill or technique based on your observations of children's current interests and skills.
Plan for safety and awareness of space, clothing, tools and resources when organising activities involving messy or sensory materials.

Adapting planning and teaching to ensure that individual needs are met Next Steps:
Plan how you will adapt materials, tools or techniques so children with physical or sensory needs can access creative activities fully.
Consider additional support (e.g. modelling, simplified choices) for children who find open-ended creative tasks difficult to start.
Identify how you will extend imaginative and creative opportunities for children who are confident and independent in their creative expression.
Plan how you will introduce sensory materials (e.g. paint, slime, clay) sensitively, drawing on your knowledge of individual children's sensory preferences, needs and comfort with touch.

Pupil progress in this lesson and use of assessment (including questioning) Next Steps:
Note the vocabulary of art, music or movement children use spontaneously during creative activities.
Observe how children represent and communicate their ideas through their chosen art form, and identify next steps in using materials or techniques.

Assess children's confidence in sharing their own imaginative ideas, e.g. through performance, storytelling or displayed work.

Comments about student teacher's developing Subject Knowledge and Pedagogy Next Steps

Develop knowledge of the two Expressive Arts and Design strands (Creating with Materials; Being Imaginative and Expressive) and how they interlink with communication and physical development.

Extend your subject knowledge of art, music and movement vocabulary so you can model it accurately with children.

Reflect on how documentation (learning journeys, digital portfolios, displays) is used to celebrate and share children's imaginative work with families.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Birth-to-5-Matters-Doc-LINKS.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

- McTavish, A. & Prendergast, M. (2025), 'Expressive arts and design', in Grenier, J. and Vollans, C., *Putting the EYFS Curriculum into Practice*, Sage, pp. 127-140
- Whitebread, D. & Coltman, P. (2015), *Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*. Routledge