

Guidance for Observation and Target Setting in the Early Years

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 Early Years teaching:

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
1	How does the teacher enable children to display the characteristics of effective learning: playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically?	How are the children: • finding out and exploring, using what they know in their play, and being willing to have a go? • being involved and concentrating, keeping on trying, and enjoying achieving what they set out to do? • having their own ideas, using what they already know to learn new things, and choosing and finding new ways to do things?
2	How does the teacher use high-quality interactions to support and extend children's learning?	For example, how does the teacher: • tune in to children's play and follow their lead before extending it, rather than directing it? • use sustained shared thinking to extend children's thinking? • model and extend children's vocabulary in the moment, narrating actions and introducing new words in context? • balance child-initiated interaction with adult-led teaching, avoiding over-direction of children's play?
3	How does the teacher plan for and use continuous provision to extend children's learning?	For example, how does the teacher: • ensure areas of continuous provision are purposefully resourced and clearly linked to

	Question (no more than 6)	Additional Information
		current learning intentions and children's interests? • interact within continuous provision to extend learning, rather than only supervising? • use continuous provision to consolidate and practise skills introduced in adult-led activities? • provide access to purposeful technology within continuous provision, ensuring the child – not the device – drives the activity?
4	What opportunities are there for children to develop self-regulation?	For example, through: • co-regulation to promote and encourage positive behaviour • co-regulation to support children to manage their emotions • teacher modelling learning strategies • play
5	Is the rationale/link to learning clear for each activity (adult-led and continuous provision) – what skills are the children learning in each area?	• Consider the learning objective for each area and the outcomes children need to meet this, linked to the EYFS. • How does this draw on children's prior knowledge in the area to show how learning progresses?
6	How is the environment made accessible to the children to access independently?	For example: • How does the teacher ensure the children have space and time to access the environment – indoor and outdoor? • How are the children involved, eg in displays? • How does the teacher involve children in caring for and looking after the environment, indoors and outdoors, e.g. tidying, growing, recycling?

Potential Early Years Specific Targets on Lesson Analysis Forms.

Lesson design and delivery, including sequencing and choice of teaching methods Next Steps:

Plan how continuous provision will link to and consolidate the learning objective for that session's adult-led activities.

Include use of the outdoor area in your planning, ensuring continuous provision extends learning both indoors and outdoors.

Adapt resources within provision to include print (text or number) linked to current learning.

Plan possible sustained shared thinking questions or prompts in advance, for use both in adult-led teaching and within continuous provision.

Think about how you are leading the other adults in the room, e.g. briefing them on planned interactions within continuous provision, or involving them directly in carpet time or small groups.

Adapting planning and teaching to ensure that individual needs are met Next Steps:

Consider how you will adapt continuous provision and adult-led activities for children with SEND, EAL, or those working above age-related expectations.

Plan specific strategies (e.g. visual supports, additional modelling, pre-teaching key vocabulary) for children who need extra support to access an activity.

Identify how you will extend or scaffold an activity in the moment based on how individual children respond.

Pupil progress in this lesson and use of assessment (including questioning) Next Steps:

Consider how to support focus children within continuous provision, including planned interactions to extend their learning.

Look at [area of learning] expectations for [age group] – think about which elements you want the children to meet and how you will be sure they are secure with them.

Use questioning during continuous provision to assess and extend children's understanding, not only to check facts.

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

Develop ways of extending children's vocabulary further, both in adult-led teaching and through interactions within continuous provision.

Ensure the link to learning is clear for each activity – consider your learning objective for each area and the outcomes children need to meet this, linked to the EYFS.

Develop your knowledge of what high-quality interactions look like (e.g. sustained shared thinking, following the child's lead) and how to use them consistently across the session.

<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>

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- [High-quality interactions | EEF](#)
- Bryce-Clegg, A. (2025), *Continuous Provision in the Early Years*. Bloomsbury Education.
- Bryce-Clegg, A. (2025), *Continuous Provision: The Skills. Enhancing children's knowledge through skills-based learning*. Bloomsbury Education.