‘Observation entails close attention to children’s behaviour within particular contexts, followed by assessment involving reflection and evaluation in terms of children’s knowledge, skills, well-being and thinking. Planning is the response that is intended to support, challenge or extend the learning.’

Nancy Stewart 2011

Statutory Framework for the EYFS - September 2014:

The learning and development requirements

1.3 ‘There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational programmes in early years settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected.’

1.3 ‘The three prime areas are particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.’

1.4 ‘Providers must also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied.’

1.6 ‘Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to focus strongly on the prime areas, which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas.’

1.7 ‘For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home.’

1.9 ‘In planning and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice.’ The three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are: playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically.’

1.10 ‘The key person must help ensure that every child’s learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. The key person must seek to engage and support parents and/or carers in guiding their child’s development at home.’
Principles of the Observation, Assessment and Planning Cycle

Effective planning and provision starts with observing children and is a continuous process as shown:

1.6 ‘Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development.’

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. DfE, 2014

Observation

2.1 ‘It involves practitioners observing children to understand their level of achievement, interests and learning styles, and then to shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations.’

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. DfE, 2014
Quality observations:
- are embedded in every day practice to build up an accurate picture of the unique child
- may include spontaneous, narrative and digitally recorded observations
- are purposeful, informative and positive to capture how children learn, what children know, can do, are currently interested in and demonstrates their current stage of development
- are completed in a range of contexts, for example in their independent play, during everyday routines and when engaged with others
- reflect multiple perspectives - the child, their family and practitioners

Characteristics of Effective Learning

1.9 ‘In planning and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice.’

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. DfE, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playing and exploring</th>
<th>Active Learning</th>
<th>Creating and Thinking Critically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding out and exploring</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being involved and concentrating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Having their own ideas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Showing curiosity about objects, events and people</td>
<td>- Maintaining focus on their activity for a period of time</td>
<td>- Thinking of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using senses to explore the world around them</td>
<td>- Showing high levels of energy, fascination</td>
<td>- Finding ways to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Engaging in open ended activity</td>
<td>- Not easily distracted</td>
<td>- Finding new ways to do things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Showing particular interests</td>
<td>- Paying attention to details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playing with what they know</strong></td>
<td><strong>Keeping on trying</strong></td>
<td><strong>Making links</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pretending objects are things from their experience</td>
<td>- Persisting with activity when challenges occur</td>
<td>- Making links and noticing patterns in their experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Representing their experiences in play</td>
<td>- Showing a belief that more effort or a different approach will pay off</td>
<td>- Making predictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking on a role in their play</td>
<td>- Bouncing back after difficulties</td>
<td>- Testing their ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acting out experiences with other people</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Developing ideas of grouping, sequences, cause and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being willing to have a go</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enjoying achieving what they set out to do</strong></td>
<td><strong>Choosing ways to do things</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Initiating activities</td>
<td>- Showing satisfaction in meeting their own goals</td>
<td>- Planning, making decisions about how to approach a task, solve a problem and reach a goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seeking challenge</td>
<td>- Being proud of how they accomplished something - not just the end result</td>
<td>- Checking how well their activities are going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Showing a ‘can do’ attitude</td>
<td>- Enjoying meeting challenges for their own sake rather than external rewards or praise</td>
<td>- Changing strategy as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking a risk, engaging in new experiences, and learning by trial and error</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reviewing how well the approach worked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

On-going formative assessment is at the heart of early years practice. It is the link between observing children and effective planning to support their progress.

2.1 ‘Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support.’

2.2 ‘Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork. Paperwork should be limited to that which is absolutely necessary to promote children’s successful learning and development.’

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Department for Education, 2014

Accurate assessments:
- enable practitioners to evaluate observations to identify next steps in children’s learning and development
- value the voice of the child
- provide an insight into how best to help each child develop and learn and prioritise high quality teaching learning experiences and opportunities
- actively engage parents in developing a picture of each child identifying any learning and development needs

Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process.

Practitioners need to:
- ‘have high expectations of all children based on accurate assessment of children’s skills, knowledge and understanding on entry to the setting’ (p.9)
- ‘complete regular and precise assessments of children and use these effectively to suitably challenging activities’ (p.9)

Leaders and managers need to:
- ensure that planning and assessment are consistent, precise, and display an accurate understanding of all children’s skills, abilities and understanding
- target individual children or groups of children with identified needs, monitor their progress rigorously so appropriate interventions are sought and gaps are closing’ (p.16)

Evaluation schedule for inspections of registered early years provision. August 2014, No.120086

A summary of a child’s achievements at a particular point in time so that their progress can be tracked is known as summative assessment.
The EYFS requires early years practitioners to review children’s progress and share a written summary with parents at two significant points:

- in the prime areas between the ages of 24 and 36 months to highlight achievements and areas in which extra support may be required (Progress check at age two)
- against the early learning goals, along with a brief report on the characteristics of learning at the end of the EYFS (EYFS Profile)

**Planning**

Planning is based on what has been observed about individual children’s learning styles and achievements, and supports quality provision.

Effective planning:

- is based on regular, accurate assessments of children’s learning, knowledge and skills
- reflects, supports and challenges children’s current interests, enthusiasms and their learning and development
- is a flexible, working document, which is responsive to spontaneous events
- enables all practitioners to contribute, understand and articulate why experiences have been planned
- enables children, parents and practitioners to have a voice in the planning process

**Planning in Practice – Key Elements:**

- provides opportunities for individual children’s emerging needs, interests and stage of development based on previous observations and evaluations
- identifies appropriate links between experiences and EYFS development statements (learning intentions)
- provides interesting and challenging experiences for all children within the seven areas of learning and development
- outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis
- identifies what adults can do to support children’s learning
- identifies differentiation for individual children or groups of children
- provides a range of child initiated and adult-led experiences
- identifies high quality teaching strategies, together with support and intervention, that match individual children’s needs (next steps) to ensure good progress
- evaluates planned and unplanned learning
- reflects on the learning environment to adapt and enhance provision
Reflective questions

Observation
- What is it like for a child here?
- Are all practitioners responding to observations about children’s progress?
- How do peer on peer observations encourage professional communication and help practitioners develop a ‘shared language’ about teaching and learning?

Assessment
- How are children’s starting points assessed? Who is involved in this process?
- Do children and parents have a voice in the assessment process? How?
- Are our tracking systems effectively building a picture of a child’s progress?
- How do we seek and share assessment information with parents? Is it effective?
- How are interventions put in place to support all children and enable them to succeed?
- How do we build effective relationships with other professionals?
- What difference are we making and do we know? Are we narrowing the gap?

Planning
- Is our planning purposeful? How does it meet the needs of all children?
- How does our planning build on children’s interests?
- How are planning systems embedded in practice and consistently applied throughout the setting?
- How do practitioners support and extend children’s learning, develop their language, feed in new vocabulary and challenge children’s thinking?
- Are we effectively sharing information and working in partnership with other providers, schools and professionals? How? When?

Leadership and management
- As leaders and managers do we have a clear vision for our setting?
- How do we inspire our staff and lead by example?
- Is our expectation of the staff’s performance and quality of teaching really high? How do we monitor performance and quality of teaching and learning?
- How do we take the necessary next steps to improve the quality of teaching?
- Do we have a clear understanding of the progress children are making?
- Are we working effectively with parents?
- Do we complete regular and rigorous performance management?
- Do we provide access to continuing training and professional development?
- Do we challenge poor performance?
- Do we share good practice locally?

Glossary of Terms

Narrowing the gap: meeting the needs of children who are most at risk of falling behind.
Further reading

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. DfE. 2014
www.education.gov.uk

Early Years Outcomes. DfE. 2013 www.education.gov.uk

Getting it right first time: Achieving and maintaining high quality early years provision
(130117) Ofsted, 2013; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130117

Case studies of some of the providers can be found on Ofsted’s Good practice website at;
www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk

Early Development - Bridging the gap between evidence and policy in Early Years
Education. Institute for public policy research Aug 2013

Evaluation schedule for inspections of registered early years provision. Ofsted Guidance.
August 2014. No. 120086

www.early-education.org.uk