**Data Analysis - Good Practice in the Early Years in Schools**

**When used well, data can have a profound and positive impact.’**

(Eliminating unnecessary workload associated with data management - Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group March 2016)

**Observation, Assessment and Planning** cycle lies at the heart of effective Early years practice. The cycle of assessment begins with a baseline assessment when children join the Nursery / Reception class. This is followed by on-going formative observational assessment that informs curriculum planning and the ‘next steps’ for the child.

**Baseline Assessment**

An accurate baseline assessment is critical and supports the Early Help agenda in which support can be put in place as soon as possible to ensure that individual children’s needs are well met. To achieve accuracy, children need time to settle in and build relationships with their key person. Children are then assessed against expectations for their age ([Development Matters](https://early-education.org.uk/development-matters-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-download) – a non-statutory document that has been revised for 2021.) Baseline assessment should be based primarily on observations and professional knowledge of the child. If the child had attended a previous setting, transition discussions and assessment data from this setting should also be considered. Input from parents should be included in these initial assessments, drawing on information gathered from home visits, informal discussions and any written feedback e.g. All about Me documents.

A National Reception Baseline Assessment is to be introduced in 2021. (Early Adopters have used this in September 2020)

**On-going assessment**

After a clear baseline has been established, assessments will be based on regular observations of both child- and adult-initiated activities. Best fit judgements are then made at assessment points throughout the year (depending on school policy.) Summative data should be analysed and used to feed into children’s next steps and curriculum planning.

**Assessment tools**

Schools use a range of tools to support effective assessment:

• Paper based approaches include documenting learning stories and using observation templates, that can link to EYFS areas of learning and development and the characteristics of effective learning. Observations are then collated into individual progress records / learning journals which provide an overview of the development of each child. Parents should also be encouraged to contribute to their child’s learning journal. It is good practice to ensure that parents and children can access these journals regularly.

• Digital packages. Many schools now use online software packages to support assessment, with observations recorded on tablets and uploaded immediately to online platforms. Typical features include the facility to link observations to EYFS areas of learning and development and the characteristics of effective learning; the ability to interrogate data at the individual and cohort level; and the facility to share observations with parents on secure on-line platforms.

**Application of assessment data**

Assessing young children should not be a tick box exercise but be used effectively to identify those requiring additional support, to support learning and development, to engage parents and feed into curriculum planning.

“*Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists. The age/stage bands overlap because these are not fixed age boundaries but suggest a typical range of development.”* (Development Matters, 2012)

**Identifying and addressing additional support needs**

Children who are not making sufficient progress can be identified through analysis of assessment data and staff discussion, alongside consultation with parents and other professionals working with the child. Particular attention should be paid to the attainment and progress of ‘vulnerable’ groups such as children with SEND, children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium funding, Pupil premium, Children We Care For (CWCF previously known as Looked After Children, LAC ) Forces and Gypsy ,Romany, Traveller children.

**Data analysis – Questions to consider:**

* How many children are working at or beyond their individual developmental age/stage band across the 17 strands of learning ? What is this as a percentage?
* How many of these children were boys, girls, autumn/spring/summer born, EAL, SEND, Pupil Premium, FSM, GRT, CWCF), more able, forces families; consider children’s starting points
* Are there differences in the data between classes / rooms (if applicable)?
* What does the data tell us about the attainment and needs of individual children e.g. SEND/EAL/Early Years Pupil Premium/more able?
* How are Reception colleagues using the data to inform planning?
* Does the assessment data identify areas of provision/ curriculum that need further development? These areas can be reviewed and addressed through Action planning, curriculum resources and staff training.
* What does the final data tell you about the quality of Early Years practice and provision?
* What changes could be made to improve outcomes next year?

**Accuracy and consistency - Questions to consider:**

For assessments to be useful and effective, it is important that they accurately reflect the stage of development of each child and provide a clear picture of progress made over time.

• Are staff well trained with a good understanding of child development with the knowledge and skills to accurately assess stages of development?

• Do Early Years co-ordinators review the quality of observations and assessments on a regular basis and feedback any issues to the EY team?

• Are Early Years staff involved in moderation activities at a ‘hub’ or ‘cluster’ level across schools to improve consistency and accuracy?

**Early Years Staff Workload.**

Early Years staff have struggled with the challenge of carrying out effective assessments and spending quality time with the children. In addition, there has been a misunderstanding that accurate assessment was dependent upon a large body of evidence. The consequent implication for workload has now been recognised and addressed by Ofsted, the DfE and has been a key consideration in the development of the new EY framework and new Development Matters.

*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…* (EYFS Statutory Framework 2017)

*Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and avoid unnecessary burdens on staff or children. (Ofsted School Handbook, Grade descriptors – Good)*

References - Study of Early Education and Development: Good Practice in Early Education

Research report January 2017 (Meg Callanan, Margaret Anderson, Sarah Haywood, Ruth Hudson and SvetlanaSpeight – NatCen Social Research