



Assessment Guidance

This guidance will help you to understand the assessment approaches recommended for Cambridge Early Years. It is divided into the following sections:

- Overview of early years assessment
- Continuous assessment
- Observation for assessment
- Assessing children at the beginning and end of the year
- Case studies to exemplify these assessment approaches.

Overview of early years assessment

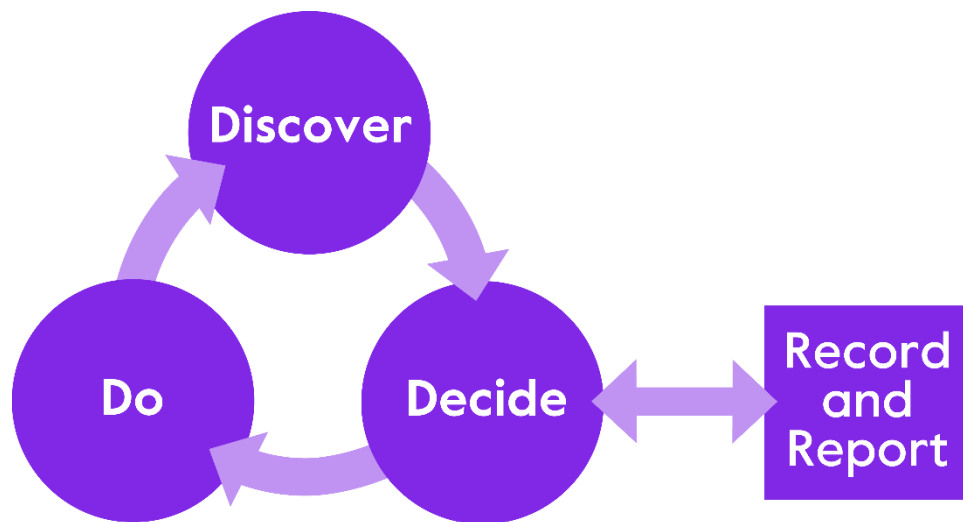
In early years settings measuring progress is about knowing each child as an individual and identifying their learning and development.

Knowing each child well allows you to compare their learning and development with the learning statements in the curriculum. This means you can identify if a child is not making the expected progress and intervene in a timely way. Responding swiftly is important, as some aspects of development are acquired quickly and readily at young ages but would require more support and structure to acquire later. You will also be able to identify particular interests for each child and areas of strength to build on.

It is important to take a systematic and holistic approach where you regularly consider each child's progress against every part of the curriculum. The most important use of this assessment will be to get to know each child better and so plan their next steps more effectively. Sometimes you will want to record what you discover, and you may need to report this to parents, carers and colleagues. This will not happen all of the time and must not distract from ongoing high-quality interactions with children.

Continuous assessment

Continuous assessment happens on an on-going, day-to-day basis. It is the most efficient way to gain evidence about what children can do, what they are interested in and how they interact with others. Most of the evidence will be from observing children as they play and take part in activities, although sometimes you will also look at things they make (such as a piece of artwork or some paper with mark making). Each piece of evidence you discover pieces together like a jigsaw to build a holistic picture of each child. These discoveries can be evaluated using the learning statements in the curriculum and will be the basis on which you decide appropriate next steps.



This process can be represented as a cycle of Discover, Decide, Do.

- Discover: What does this child currently do, think, understand and enjoy?
- Decide: What am I going to do next as a result of my discovery?
- Do: I implement my decisions and start the next discovery phase.

Sometimes you will also want to Record and Report.

Discover

Discovery is the starting point. You need to find out a child's current learning and development before you can make decisions about whether they are on track and what to do next.

You want to discover:

- What can the child do independently?
- What does the child communicate with words and body language?
- At what stage does the child ask for help? What help do they ask for?
- How do they interact with adults and other children?
- What interests them? What do they enjoy?
- What do they say about what they are doing? How do they reflect on their learning?

The most important and valuable means of discovery in the early years setting is to observe children playing because young children are at their best when they are absorbed in play. For example, an EY3 child might choose to include some writing when playing at doctors (such as making notes about the patient) and so demonstrate that they have an efficient pencil grip and can make phonetically plausible attempts at some regular words.

In addition, you will also want to observe everyday activities (e.g. routines and at meal times), plan some adult-led activities, talk with their parents or carers and ask the child to reflect on their experiences (for example by asking what they liked or disliked).

Decide

Once you think you have made discoveries about a child's learning and development, you need to reflect on these and make some decisions.

These are important questions to consider:

- How is the child progressing compared to the learning statements? Is the child on track to achieve the learning statements by the end of the year?
- Has the child fallen behind or is in danger of falling behind? If so, then why?
- What is this child interested in? Can I engage them better?
- What is this child's next step?

You may also need to decide:

- Have I seen enough evidence to make a decision or do I need to continue discovering?
- How should I involve and communicate with the child's parents or carers? Should I involve other people (e.g. health care)?

You should also reflect on what your discoveries tell you about your own practice.

You might find it helpful to consider questions like:

- Are the children in my class on track to achieve the learning statements by the end of the year?
- Are my expectations in line with the learning statements?
- Am I providing suitable activities and opportunities for children to demonstrate their current learning and development?
- Am I providing enough challenge for all children to achieve the learning statements?
- Am I providing enough appropriate and targeted support?
- How can I engage my children better?
- What are my next steps?

Do

Once you have made decisions about the next steps for a child or group of children, you need to put them into action.

You might decide to do this immediately, for example by differentiating an already planned activity. Alternatively, it might be that you act on your decisions on a future day.

As soon as you 'Do' your decisions, you should start the 'Discover' phase again to find out what happens next.

Record and Report

Recording can take a lot of time and time spent recording cannot be used for other things (such as interacting with the children). Often your discoveries do not need to be written down and you can have quick, but very useful, conversations with the adult who collects each child at the end of the day. However, it is important to create over time a record of learning and development for each child's progress against the learning statements (for example a tick list that is periodically updated for each child).

This record can be used:

- as a tool for tracking and monitoring each child's progress
- as evidence for reflecting on, and planning for, each child's next steps
- to create reports for:
 - parents and carers
 - practitioners or teachers who will teach the child the next year
 - management within the setting.

A quick approach is to record short observations onto sticky notes that can then be transferred to a child's file. These could be colour-coded to indicate an area of difficulty or strength. Any colours can be used so long as they are understood by everyone in the setting. For example, a pink sticky note with 'scissors' written on it, could mean that the child had difficulty using scissors. Every few days the child's file could be checked to see patterns emerging or whether a new skill has been developed. Once the child has been able to use scissors consistently, the sticky notes could be removed and a note or tick could be marked against the relevant learning statement (e.g. 2CEa.04 Play with and learn how to use a selection of art and design tools and materials with greater control, for example, practise mixing three primary colours in different combinations.)

Your record can also include photographs, audio and video recordings of the child (please refer to your centre's Children Protection Policy for guidance before doing this). Some things that the child has made can be kept or photographed for the record (e.g. an example of mark making). You may also want to ask each child's parents or carers to provide examples of learning and development which they have seen at home.

Records can be kept on paper (e.g. with a folder for each child). Alternatively, digital tools can help to organise, store and report information. If you decide to use a digital tool, then you can find information on choosing between options on the School Support Hub.

Reports to parents or carers should be positive and informative about their child's development. This can be achieved through a combination of written reports and face-to-face (or virtual) meetings with the practitioner and parents or carers. If you discover that parents or carers are using reports inappropriately (e.g. to compare, criticise or compete) then you may wish to alter your reporting strategy.

Observation for assessment

Observations are fundamental for gaining evidence on young children's learning and development. So, as a practitioner, you will be alert to all that is happening around you especially during play and everyday activities. You will also need to know the learning statements for the year(s) you work with very well. Effectively assessing every child in a holistic and systematic way requires great skill and expertise. It takes time, practice and ongoing reflection by every practitioner. You and your colleagues can support each other by observing each other and giving feedback.

Some tips for getting started are:

- Observe children when they are likely to be at their best (e.g. during an activity they are enjoying and absorbed in and when they are not too tired).
- You can't observe everything all of the time. Attempt to discover one or two useful things from each observation.
- Aim to find out more about what a child is thinking by encouraging them to talk (e.g. 'I wonder how you made that' or 'What did you enjoy about this activity?').
- Sometimes you will want to focus on a particular area that you've been working on with a child or a group of children. This might involve planning a particular activity such as using instruments in music time.

- If you are observing child-initiated play, try not to interrupt for about 10 minutes. Get down to the level of the child and close enough to hear without becoming part of the activity. If problems emerge (e.g. a child not holding a paint brush properly) then see how the child reacts rather than intervening to show them what to do. They may try different approaches unprompted or give up and go to another activity. These are useful discoveries and you can respond to all you have found out in future activities.
- If a child needs help, then show them what to do and then let them do it independently. This will tell you more than if you talk them through each step.

Assessing children at the beginning and end of the year

It is a good idea to do a baseline assessment to get to know each child at the beginning of the year or when the child starts at the setting. It should cover all curriculum areas and allow you to get a good understanding of the child's current learning and development. It is important to make a record of this assessment so that you can track progress during the year. If you repeat a similar process later in the year, then this can provide good evidence of progress.

Cambridge provides additional support for doing baseline assessments:

- When children enter EY1 you can use the approaches in the Transition to EY1 document to evaluate a child's progress against milestones in their Physical development, Language and Communication development, Cognitive development and Social and Emotional development.
- For children aged 4–5 (EY2) you can use Cambridge Early Years Check Together. This is a computer-based assessment which quickly identifies what young children know and can do in a range of areas. Cambridge Early Years Check Together can be repeated at the end of EY2 for each child. Not only does this allow progress in EY2 to be identified, but it also supports planning for a smooth transition to EY3.

After doing a baseline assessment, you will continuously assess the children during each year using the learning statements. Your ongoing record of their progress can also be used to provide evidence of progress and be summarised at the end of each year. These end of year summaries can be used to plan for a smooth transition to the next year of learning.

Case Studies

These case studies illustrate assessment in Cambridge Early Years. In each one you can see how the principles of Discover, Decide, Do, Record and Report apply in different situations.

I see a C (3 year old)

You have begun to introduce your EY1 class to saying the sound that begins their name. They have playfully explored the shape of the first letter of their name by air tracing and finger painting.

Discover

Carina's mother excitedly tells you that when they went shopping together, Carina was able to spot eight different products that had the letter 'C' on their labels.

Decide

Carina is making links between what she is learning in the setting and her home life. This is good evidence that she is meeting the learning statement "1CLr.11 Show interest in text and images in printed material and in the environment, making connections with their own knowledge and experience."

Do

You decide to continue with the current approach of relating written letters to initial spoken sounds in familiar words. This will gradually introduce her to further, meaningful, letters. You might decide to build on the partnership with her mother by proactively letting her mother know which letters are being introduced so they can continue their game on future shopping trips.

Record and Report

You update Carina's record to show that she is meeting the expectations of 1CLr.11.

A new sister (4 year old)

Kevin is 4 years old. His parents have spent a lot of time preparing him for the arrival of his new sister. Now she is born, Kevin has responded in an unexpected way.

Discover

Information gained from parents:

When his parents speak to him, he says he is happy to have a sister, but his behaviour has changed at home. He has become tearful and is acting in ways which are out of character (throwing tantrums to get attention, refusing to interact with the baby, refusing to smile in photographs with the baby). When his parents give him the opportunity to take on big brother responsibilities, he is disinterested and occupies himself in what he is interested in (normally some sort of construction activity). The parents are concerned.

At the early years centre

You have tried to talk to Kevin about the changes at home, but he becomes silent and runs away. He is happy to talk about other topics such as what he is doing and cars.

Decide

Kevin is finding sharing his parents with a new sibling very challenging and it has unsettled him. Previously he has been the centre of his parents' attention and although his routines have not changed, he senses that his new sister has to be prioritised because she is a baby. He sees the attention his sister is getting from both his parents and wider members of the family who visit to see her. In the early years setting he needs support to talk about and manage his feelings and behaviour.

You look at the learning statements for EY1 Personal, Social and Emotional Development and see several that are relevant to Kevin's situation, for example

- 1PS.06 Reflect on their activities and experiences, saying what they liked and disliked.
- 1PS.12 Take pride in carrying out a task, especially when asked to do so by an adult.
- 1PS.17 Be aware of their own feelings and rights, describing these to an adult.
- 1PS.18 Show recognition that actions and words can affect others' feelings positively and negatively, for example, comforting a peer when they realise they have upset them.
- 1PS.19 Accept that personal needs may not be met immediately, and that individual wishes may not always be met.
- 1PS.20 Begin to accept the needs of others, including by taking turns and sharing space and resources.

Do

There are many possible next steps which could support Kevin in his Personal, Social and Emotional Development in the setting.

- Buddy Kevin with a friend who also has younger siblings. Encourage them to talk about being an older sibling.
- Provide opportunities for Kevin to express how he feels to an adult or through creative activities, e.g. drawing.
- Select and include stories about the arrival of new siblings in story time. Ask the children questions about the feelings that happen when a new baby arrives.
- Have conversations with Kevin, assuring him that when things change in the family it can sometimes feel confusing.
- Provide props to support role-play about home life and looking after babies. Observe how Kevin engages with the play with peers and adults.
- Set up activities where a group of children have to take equal responsibilities to share time and responsibilities, e.g. establishing a game with clear rules for outdoor equipment which relies on each group member making contributions for all to succeed. This encourages the taking of responsibilities.

An adult observes and interacts to encourage equal responsibility and how everyone is important to the group (like in a family).

- Provide opportunities for Kevin to have some time in a quiet space with an adult or a friend when needed (a busy classroom or play area can be overwhelming for a child who is struggling emotionally).
- Maintain routines to help Kevin feel safe and secure.

Record and Report

During the period, maintain regular contact with Kevin's parents (e.g. by talking to them when they come to collect him), understanding that this is a challenging time for the whole family as they adjust to the new baby's arrival. Explain to his parents what you are doing in the setting to help him and suggest that they try some of the same ideas at home (e.g. ensuring he has some time with them without the baby so that he gets their undivided attention). Aim to track changes in Kevin's behaviour, attitude and temperament and to celebrate successes together.

Coloured circles (5 year old)

You have organised a game for the EY3 class outside to practise gross motor skills, in particular balancing on one foot (3PD.03). You have used chalk to draw circles of different colours on the concrete. The children have to run around until you call out a colour. They then run to a circle of the right colour and balance on one foot.

Discover

You observe that Jay always runs to the circle with most people in it, regardless of whether there is a circle of the right colour nearer to him.

Later in the day you notice that Jay has chosen purple paint for his picture. When you ask him to tell you about the picture he points at the purple area and says, 'That's the sky'.

Decide

You decide that you need to find out more and investigate beyond intended learning statements. You want to find out whether Jay always likes being with the biggest group or whether there might be an issue with the way he perceives some colours.

Do

You plan a range of activities:

- Simple class games where children have to run to different places based on words rather than recognising colours (e.g. naming different sides of the hall 'summer, autumn, winter, spring). You observe how Jay decides where to run to.
- Activities in the craft area using different colours of paints and paper. You provide stimuli of different colours (such as bananas and oranges) and observe which materials Jay chooses to use.

Record and Report

If you think that Jay might have a difficulty in perceiving some colours, then you need to involve his parents or carers and relevant health professionals.

Sitting Reading (5 year old)

Prisha has recently joined your centre in EY3. Her parents or carers tell you that she loves books at home and can recognise many common words and decode phonetically regular words.

Discover

Your morning routine is to start with the children altogether. Then they can choose to go to one of several activities for free play. Prisha always stays in the book corner. She picks a large picture book but looks around at what the other children are doing.

Decide

You decide that Prisha's body language suggests she is staying in the book corner because she is nervous (not because she is focussed on her choice of book). Her alert watching of the other children may indicate that she wants to join them but does not know how to. You therefore decide to focus on her Personal, Social and Emotional Development (in particular 3PS.09 Build and maintain trusting relationships with a network of peers and adults, both at home and at school, showing appreciation and respect for others.)

Do

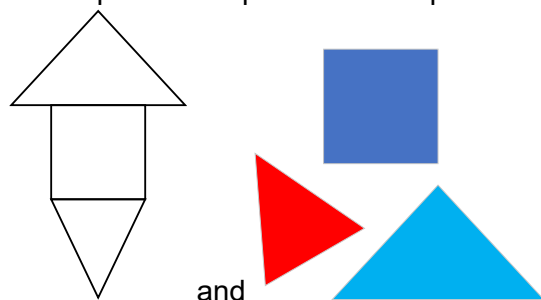
You talk to Prisha and ask her what she enjoys doing. When she says painting, you take her to join a group of children in the art area. You model with her how to introduce herself and help her to settle into the group.

Record and Report

You decide not to make a record of this but observe Prisha over the next days until you are confident that she has made some friends.

Tangram (5 year old)

You have provided your EY3 class with some outlines of shapes that can be made up of a small number of component shapes. For example



Discover

You observe closely how Jasmine approaches the puzzle. You notice that she picks up the square and places it on the outline. She starts at the top of the page and then slides in into the correct space. She then looks at the outline says, “3 sides” and picks up the blue triangle. She places this in the correct place.

She picks up the red triangle and tries to put it in the outline. She does not try to rotate it and says, “it doesn’t fit”.

Decide

You decide that Jasmine is beginning to select shapes purposefully (as she did with the blue triangle) but does not yet try to rotate the shapes. She also does not yet have a secure understanding of the EY1 concepts relating to 1Ms.03 (Show awareness of how shapes are similar, for example, find matching shapes, or match shapes to their outlines). She will need further support to meet 3Ms.01 (Experiment with and talk about rotating shapes, including saying when a shape looks identical or different as it rotates).

Do

You model to Jasmine looking at the outline, selecting a shape and then rotating it. “I can see this space is for a shape with three straight sides. A triangle. I will pick up a triangle and see if it fits. I will try to rotate it to see if it fits. Look! It fits.”

You allow Jasmine to try the same picture again. You then give her other outlines to complete with the same shapes. You observe her progress and are ready to prompt her if necessary (Have you tried rotating the shape?)

Record and Report

You make a note in Jasmine’s file that she needs further support with matching shapes to their outlines and rotating shapes.

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