NCCA
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Enacting the curriculum:

Assessment Guidance for the Primary School Curriculum

For all primary and special schools

NAVIGATION GUIDE

What is the background to the guidance? Preface and Introduction	Why do we assess? Purposes of assessment	What is high-quality assessment? Characteristics of assessment
What does assessment involve? Assessment processes and decision-making	How does assessment connect to day-to-day learning and teaching? Continuum of assessment	What assessment methods might be most useful? Assessment Methods
What does good assessment look like in practice? Exemplars of assessment in practice	What are considerations for whole-school level? Whole-school considerations	What are key features of the guidance? Assessment at a glance

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Preface

The redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* marks a new phase for education in primary and special schools in Ireland. At its core is a shared vision of children as 'unique, competent and caring individuals' and of teachers as 'committed, skilful and agentic professionals'. *Enacting the Curriculum: Assessment Guidance for the Primary School Curriculum* (2026) aligns with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, reflecting curriculum developments in relation to learning, pedagogy, agency and inclusion, while also building upon *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (2007).

Complementing a range of broader supports and materials[1] and in keeping with broader developments from *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2024) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015), this updated guidance reflects a move towards more responsive and purposeful approaches to assessment. It places children's learning, development and progression at the centre of assessment, recognising that children learn, grow and progress in different ways and at different rates.

The emphasis placed on both teacher and child agency in the curriculum has implications for how the curriculum is experienced and enacted, necessitating guidance that supports professional learning and decision-making at a local level. Accordingly, this guidance is not intended as a checklist for practice, but as a support for teachers in using assessment in purposeful, flexible and complementary ways.

The guidance contains several interconnected chapters:

- Chapter 2: Purposes of assessment helps teachers focus on why assessment is undertaken
- Chapter 3: Characteristics of assessment describes the features of effective assessment
- Chapter 4: Assessment processes and decision-making reflects how assessment unfolds in practice
- Chapter 5: The Continuum of assessment shows how assessment connects to everyday learning and teaching
- Chapter 6: Assessment methods offers practical support for applying assessment purposefully
- Chapter 7: Exemplars illustrates assessment in practice
- Chapter 8: Whole-school considerations offers guidance on assessment beyond the classroom

Spotlight guidance provides deeper exploration of selected aspects of assessment through practical approaches, classroom examples and reflective prompts. The navigation guide provides quick links to help teachers and school leaders to find guidance most relevant to them at a given time.

[1] Broader supports and materials include but are not limited to Whole School Curriculum Planning: Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools; Enacting the Curriculum: Guidance for Teachers; Preparation for Learning, Teaching and Assessment: Updated Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools; Indicators of Effective Practice for Primary Schools: Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes; Pedagogy and inclusion support materials. These can be accessed online at **Home | Curriculum Online**.

1. Introduction

Assessment is a collaborative process involving children and teachers and, at times, parents and other stakeholders, as they gather, record, interpret, use and report information about a child's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, concepts, competencies, skills and dispositions.

Assessment is integral to high-quality learning and teaching. Embedded within everyday classroom practice, it supports teachers and children to make informed decisions that support children's learning and development and recognise progression over time. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* through the Principles of Learning, Teaching and Assessment emphasises that 'Meaningful assessment is collaborative and integral to high-quality learning and teaching. Involving children, teachers, parents and others, it provides information and supports progression in children's learning across the curriculum' (p. 7).

The *Primary School Curriculum* outlines what matters for children's learning in primary and special schools, shaped by an understanding of primary education as a time of children's 'being' and 'becoming' (*Primary Curriculum Framework*, p. 3).

This guidance is underpinned by key emphases in the *Primary School Curriculum*:

- **Learning** – Assessment supports teachers and children to understand where they are in their learning and how to make progress, as described through the key competencies and realised through broad and flexible Learning Outcomes
- **Pedagogy and assessment** – Assessment is embedded within playful and engaging Learning Experiences and supports responsive learning and teaching
- **Agency** – Assessment supports teachers and children to make informed and responsive decisions; children are supported to reflect on and take increasing responsibility for their learning
- **Inclusion and diversity** – Teachers and children use assessment to recognise and respond to the uniqueness of each child, ensuring meaningful participation for all.

The guidance is intended to support teachers'[2] everyday classroom practice and inform whole-school considerations, alongside national policies and other relevant curriculum and assessment guidance.

[2] The term 'teachers' used in this document is an umbrella term for all teaching staff in a school such as mainstream class teachers, special school teachers, special class teachers, special education teachers (SET), English as an additional language (EAL) teachers and school leaders.

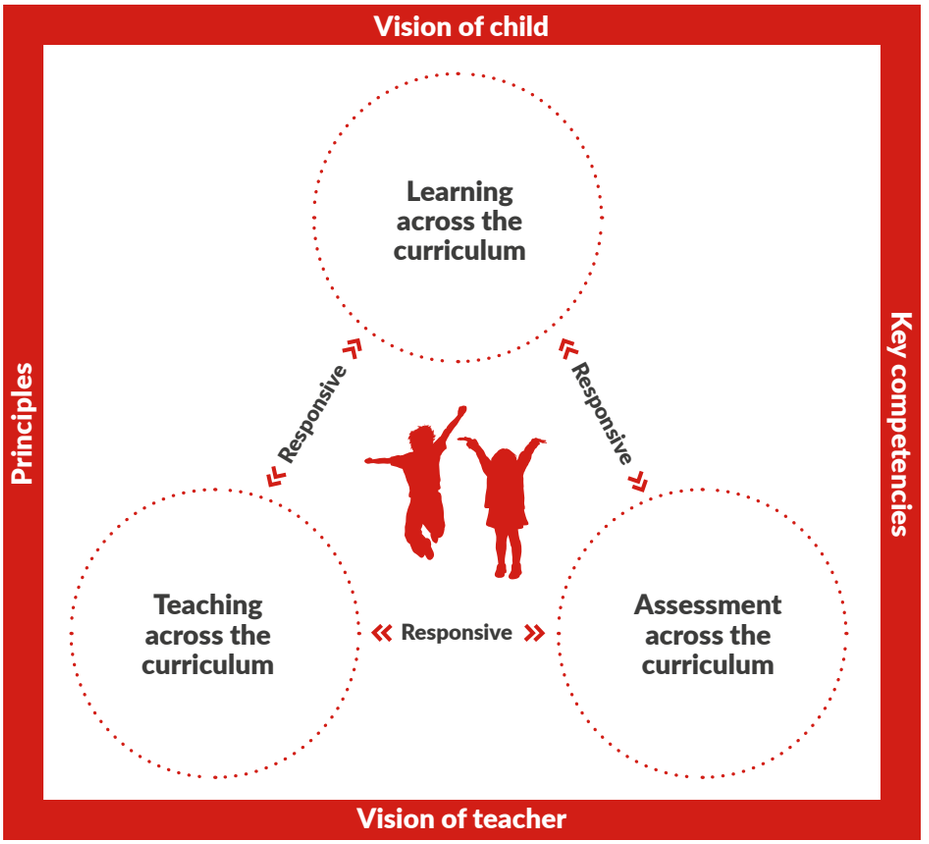


Figure 1: The curriculum in practice

2. Purposes of Assessment

In general, assessment serves three main purposes:

To support learning and teaching

To support learning and teaching

Assessment supports learning and teaching by:

- **Informing preparation** – providing timely, evidence-informed insights into what children know, understand and can do and where additional support, challenge or different Learning Experiences may be needed
- **Enabling responsive teaching** – informing decisions about pace, sequencing and adaptations to Learning Experiences as learning unfolds
- **Supporting all children to make progress** – identifying strengths, patterns and potential barriers so that appropriate supports, scaffolds and levels of challenge can be provided.

To understand and empower children as learners

To understand and empower children as learners

Assessment helps teachers to develop a deeper understanding of children as learners and children to build knowledge of themselves by:

- **Supporting children's participation and reflection** – engaging children in discussing their learning, reflecting on progress and taking increased ownership over their learning, with appropriate supports where needed
- **Building a holistic picture** – noticing, gathering, interpreting and responding to learning across a broad range of different contexts and Learning Experiences
- **Recognising and celebrating children's learning journeys** – making learning visible through sharing and acknowledging effort, progress and achievement, to support confidence, motivation, participation and appreciation of diversity in how they and others learn.

To facilitate the sharing of information

To facilitate the sharing of information

Assessment provides valuable information for various stakeholders, most importantly, children. When shared appropriately and in accessible ways, assessment information[3] can support:

- **Communication and collaboration** – supporting meaningful conversations about learning, co-ordinated supports and professional decision-making
- **Continuity and inclusion** – supporting transitions, informing next steps and contributing to a shared understanding of children's learning, development and progression.

Figure 2: Purposes of assessment

[3] At certain times and where appropriate, high-level assessment information may be shared with the Department of Education and Youth to inform policymaking and system-level planning. Sharing information is governed by legislation, Departmental circulars and data-protection requirements, ensuring that information is used only for its intended purpose and handled with the highest levels of confidentiality and care.

3. Characteristics of Assessment

In primary and special schools, high-quality classroom assessment is underpinned by characteristics that ensure it is meaningful, effective and supportive of all children.

Assessment is **Empowering** [E]	
Assessment is empowering when it supports learning and teaching and enables children to participate actively and confidently in their learning	
For teachers, this involves gathering meaningful, dependable insights that support professional judgement and next steps in learning	For children, assessment supports reflection, confidence and increasing ownership of learning, enabling them to recognise their progress, make informed choices about next steps

Assessment is **Purposeful** [P]	
Assessment is purposeful when it is guided by a clear understanding of why it is being used and how it will support learning	
For teachers, this involves designing and selecting methods that align with the Focus(es) of Learning and provide useful and dependable information about children's learning and progression	For children, assessment helps them understand what they are learning, why it matters and how they can progress

Assessment is **Inclusive** [I]	
Assessment is inclusive when it is responsive, accessible and grounded in children's strengths	
For teachers, this involves recognising and responding to children's strengths, interests and support needs while maintaining high expectations for all	For children, assessment provides meaningful and accessible ways for children to demonstrate learning, participate and experience success

Assessment is **Collaborative** [C]	
Assessment is collaborative when it involves dialogue, partnership and a shared understanding	
For teachers, this involves actively engaging children, parents, other teachers and professionals in conversations that support learning, progression, transitions and continuity	For children, assessment is something undertaken with them, through respectful reflection, feedback and sharing Learning Experiences

Table 1: Characteristics of assessment

Spotlight on: Adopting a strengths-based lens

A strengths-based lens starts with what children know, can do and care about. It recognises each child as a competent learner with unique strengths, abilities, interests, needs and circumstances. Assessment uses this understanding as a foundation for meaningful next steps in learning and development.

In practice, this involves:

- Noticing and building on what is working well for the child
- Using children's interests to motivate and extend learning
- Framing goals in positive, achievable and capability-focused ways
- Identifying barriers to learning and creating learning environments where all children can experience success, feel valued and belong.

Practice	Examples of what this might involve
Noticing and building on what is working well for the child	Ms Murphy notices that Ciara confidently explains ideas during group discussions, even though she is reluctant to write independently. She uses oral storytelling and peer talk as a starting point for developing her confidence in writing.
Using children's interests to motivate and extend learning	Múinteoir Seán notices a group of children's enthusiasm for and interest in minibeasts. He plans opportunities for observing and researching minibeasts in Science, measuring and comparing them in Mathematics, and drawing, describing and creating stories about them in Art and Languages.
Framing goals in positive, achievable and capability-focused ways	In PE, Ms Harte recognises that Noah can confidently balance and move with control. She sets a goal for Noah to combine two movements into a simple sequence, building gradually towards more complex routines over time.
Identifying barriers to learning and creating learning environments where all children can experience success, feel valued and belong	Emma recognises that Laura participates more confidently when given visual supports and additional time to process information and instructions. She adapts Learning Experiences accordingly so that Laura can contribute successfully alongside peers.

Table 2: Examples of adopting a strengths-based lens

For children, this means assessment experiences that are meaningful, responsive, engaging and accessible.

4. Assessment Processes and Decision-making

Teachers are decision-makers. Every day and often from moment to moment, they use assessment information to make informed decisions in their classrooms and settings.

Assessment information		
Assessment information offers an important entry point for preparation for learning, teaching and assessment. It is both shaped by and builds teachers' knowledge of:		
The children in their class, including their prior learning, strengths, interests and needs	Children's learning and progression in relation to the curriculum, including the Key Competencies and Learning Outcomes	Approaches to pedagogy and assessment

Assessment information refers to the broad range of information generated during interactions, discussion, play, tasks, Learning Experiences and assessment events. It may also be visible in the learning environment through children's work, displays, portfolios and other artefacts. However, not all assessment information carries the same significance in every context or situation. Evidence is the assessment information that teachers identify as particularly meaningful and relevant for answering a question, making a judgement or informing next steps.

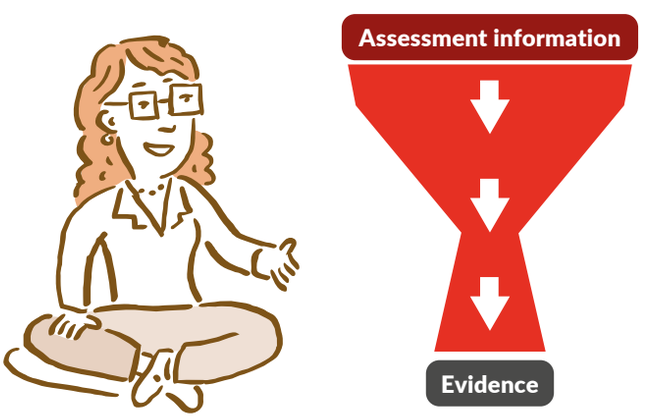


Figure 3: Assessment information and evidence

The Focus(es) of Learning, together with aspects of children's learning and development considered most significant for the child within a particular context, guides what teachers and children attend to, what assessment information becomes important and how that information is interpreted and used. Teachers cannot attend equally to every aspect of learning and development at all times. Instead, they use their professional judgement to decide what is most significant to focus on, what information is most useful to gather and how assessment can meaningfully support next steps for learning and teaching.

Assessment processes support teachers and children to notice, gather, interpret and respond to assessment information in purposeful ways. In busy classrooms, teachers and children move fluidly between these processes.

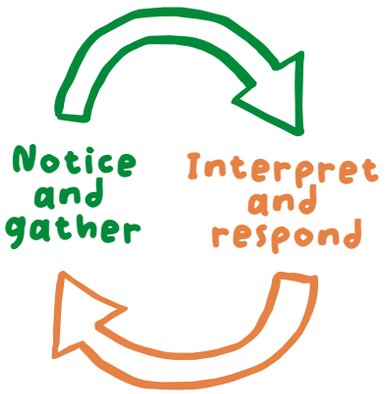


Figure 4: Assessment processes

While this section explores these processes mostly from the perspective of the teacher, further guidance on how children can be supported to engage with these processes is available in Exemplar E.

Notice and gather

Notice and gather	
Noticing involves being attuned to what children communicate, do and demonstrate during everyday interactions, planned Learning Experiences and more structured assessment events. It can be intuitive or intentional. Teachers use professional judgement to prioritise what is most important to notice and which aspects of learning are most significant to inform next steps.	Gathering involves capturing assessment information in purposeful ways. Gathered over time and across different contexts, this information contributes to a fuller and more dependable understanding of the child and their learning.

Table 3: Notice and gather

When noticing and gathering, these prompts support teachers in using assessment in ways that are **E**mpowering [E], **P**urposeful [P], **I**nclusive [I] and **C**ollaborative [C]:

- What aspects of children's learning are most significant to attend to? [E, P]
- What assessment information is most meaningful for understanding children's learning, development and/or progression? [P]
- What additional evidence may be needed to build a fuller picture of children's learning and why? [P, I]
- Which assessment methods are most appropriate for gathering insights into children's learning and development? [P, I, C]
- How can children be supported to demonstrate, apply and reflect on their learning and progression? [E, I]
- What patterns or developments in learning are beginning to emerge over time? [P]

Existing artefacts of learning such as children's work, displays, journal notes, photographs, digital recordings and portfolio entries can also be valuable sources of evidence. Revisiting these artefacts with children over time can support reflection, discussion and self-assessment, while also helping teachers and children to recognise patterns, progression and next steps in learning. Used in this way, assessment information is not only gathered in the moment, but can remain visible, meaningful and active within the learning environment, providing a foundation for future learning and teaching.

Interpret and Respond

Interpret and respond	
Interpreting involves teachers and children making sense of what has been noticed and gathered to identify relevant evidence. As learning is developmental and non-linear, teachers focus on patterns rather than isolated instances and consider evidence within the broader context of children's experiences.	Responding involves using this evidence to inform next steps.
Through interpretation, teachers develop insights into:	Drawing on their knowledge of the child, the curriculum and pedagogy, teachers may respond:
• patterns in children's understanding, engagement and participation • the development of knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values • similarities and differences across children's learning • children's progression towards Learning Outcomes • areas requiring additional support • pedagogical approaches that children respond well to.	• in the moment: through feedback, questioning and adjusting support or challenge • through preparation: by refining the Focus(es) of Learning, adapting Learning Experiences and differentiating success criteria • over time: by refining pedagogical approaches or learning environment and recruiting additional support provision or resources.

Table 4: Interpret and respond

When interpreting and responding, the following prompts may support teachers in using assessment in ways that are **E**mpowering [E], **P**urposeful [P], **I**nclusive [I] and **C**ollaborative [C]:

- What does the evidence show about children's learning, development and progression? [P]
- What factors may be influencing the evidence gathered? [I]
- What strengths, interests or support needs are becoming visible? What patterns are emerging over time? [P, C]
- How can children be supported to reflect on this evidence and identify next steps? [E, P, I, C]
- What is working well and where may additional support or challenge be needed? [P, I]
- What are the most appropriate next steps for learning and teaching? [E, P]
- How can the learning environment, Learning Experiences or supports be adapted to better meet children's strengths and needs? [E, P, I, C]
- How might this information support communication and collaboration with children, parents and colleagues? [E, P, I, C]
- Given my interpretations, what should be the Focus(es) of Learning and assessment in future lessons? [P]

Interpreting and responding to evidence in practice

During Ms O'Sullivan's Stage 3 Music Lesson, children are exploring and creating music inspired by a theme. The Focus of Learning is on musical composition to communicate the theme of 'summer thunderstorms'. Using a range of sound sources, children collaborate to create a short piece of music incorporating music concepts including structure, dynamics, tempo and timbre. The teacher observes, scaffolds, encourages reflection and provides feedback to support children throughout the lesson – during initial discussion (developing shared success criteria), as they explore sounds and techniques using range of instruments and tools, and as they collaborate in generating, adapting and structuring their ideas.

She gathers assessment information relating to:

- How children generate, filter, adapt and structure their musical ideas (using graphic notation to support their creative process)
- How children show and apply understanding of music concepts, and use instruments and body percussion creatively to communicate the theme
- Engagement, collaboration and creative risk-taking within the composition process.

During one group interaction, Anna is exploring how to play a glockenspiel in a way that reflects rainfall. She creates a short melody and strikes the instrument by tapping her fingers, nails and different objects to create a range of effects. When she shares her ideas with group member John, she asks him, "Do you think I should play it softly maybe by using the tips of my fingers at the start and then later on get louder and play using the metal hammer? Because in the summer a thunderstorm might start with a rain shower and get really heavy." John replies: "I hadn't thought of playing it in different ways. That would be a good idea, and changing the tempo of how loud and soft it is." Anna corrects him and says: "I think you mean dynamics of loud and soft."

For Ms O'Sullivan, this interaction becomes meaningful evidence of learning. It suggests that Anna is engaging with the theme through composition, is engaging creatively and trying new ways of playing instruments to communicate the theme. It also shows that she is confident in her understanding and use of dynamics. While she observes that James is engaged with and interested in the composition process, his understanding of terms like dynamics is emerging and he is beginning to appreciate the possibilities of playing instruments in different ways. She uses this evidence to encourage Anna to share ideas for playing instruments creatively, revisiting the musical concepts of timbre and dynamics with the class as a whole, and encouraging group reflection.

Spotlight on: Interpreting and making sense of assessment information

Interpreting assessment information is central to responsive teaching. The processes of noticing and gathering, interpreting and responding help teachers distinguish between:

- what they observe or gather as evidence of learning, development and/or progression
- what this evidence might suggest about the child's understanding, skills or needs
- how they might respond to support next steps in learning.

Notice and gather (What am I seeing or hearing?)	Interpret (What might this suggest about the child's learning?)	Respond (What response, support or next step might help?)
The child used drawings to explain their thinking	The child may be communicating understanding more effectively through visual modes and may benefit from multimodal opportunities to represent learning	Provide additional visual and oral ways for the child to demonstrate learning
The child relies heavily on peer support during the task	The child may still be developing confidence or independence with this skill	Model the skill again and provide scaffolded practice opportunities
The child achieved a low score in a test but demonstrated stronger understanding during classroom discussion	The assessment result may not fully reflect the child's understanding and could have been influenced by factors such as language demands, confidence, anxiety or the format of the task	Gather additional evidence through observation and teacher-designed tasks and provide alternative opportunities for the child to demonstrate learning
The child successfully applied a skill during play-based learning but not during a written activity	The child may be able to demonstrate understanding more effectively in practice or interactive contexts and may still be developing confidence in written expression	Provide varied opportunities for the child to apply and demonstrate learning across different contexts and formats
During reflection the child identified what helped them complete the task successfully	The child is beginning to recognise effective learning strategies and develop awareness of their own learning	Support the child to set goals and reflect on strategies that support future learning

Table 5: Interpreting and making sense of assessment information

Interpreting assessment information requires teachers to draw on their professional judgement and consider the broader context of the child's learning. A single observation, conversation or assessment result rarely provides a complete picture. Teachers therefore gather evidence over time, across different contexts and using a range of approaches to build a richer understanding of learning.

5. Continuum of Assessment

The Continuum of Assessment highlights the different ways that assessment occurs in primary and special schools. Assessment may arise through everyday interactions, be planned and embedded within Learning Experiences or take place through more structured assessment events. These approaches are interconnected in practice. Together, they provide complementary information that supports responsive decision-making and a broader understanding of children's learning.

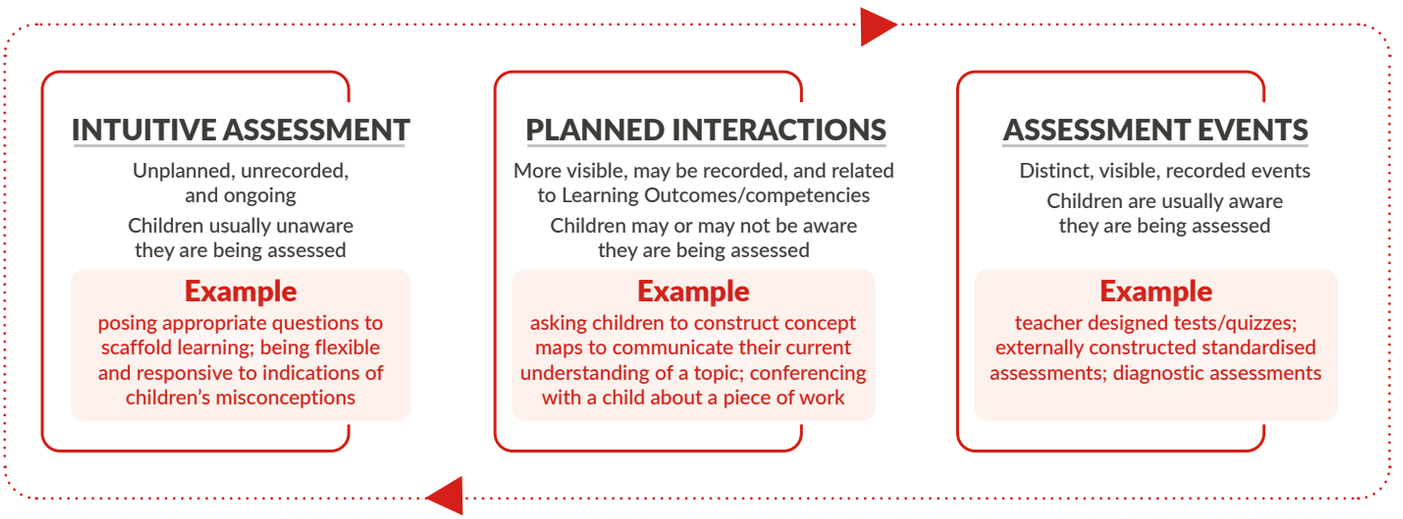


Figure 5: Continuum of Assessment

Intuitive assessment

Intuitive assessment is grounded in teachers' professional judgement during everyday interactions and Learning Experiences. It supports immediate, in-the-moment decisions about learning and teaching. It is usually not recorded, although brief notes may be useful when an observation is significant.

Teachers use intuitive assessment to:

- notice children's engagement, confidence, uncertainty, interests or misconceptions
- clarify understanding during discussion or interaction
- respond immediately by adapting support, challenge, pace or the Learning Experiences
- identify moments that may need follow-up through planned interactions or assessment events.

In practice, this may involve:

- noticing incremental progress in engagement, communication or skill development
- modelling language or extending vocabulary in response to children's contributions
- adapting activities or supports in response to participation and engagement
- revisiting a misconception through questioning, feedback or a later planned interaction.

Planned interactions

Planned interactions are purposeful and flexible opportunities for assessment that are stitched into the fabric of everyday Learning Experiences. They are intentionally planned but remain flexible and responsive to learning as it unfolds. They are usually aligned with the Focus(es) of Learning and draw on the most appropriate assessment methods to support learning and generate meaningful evidence. Planned interactions may generate evidence through questions, dialogue, work samples, teacher notes, peer- or self-assessment, checklists, rubrics or other artefacts from the Learning Experience. Some of this evidence may be recorded where it is useful and appropriate.

Planned interactions are most effective when they:

- make the Focus(es) of Learning and success criteria clear
- elicit children's thinking through questioning, dialogue or activity
- actively involve children in reflection, peer- or self-assessment
- provide feedback that affirms effort and supports improvement, progression and ownership.

In practice, this may include:

- collaborative music-making where children co-construct success criteria and engage in peer- and self- assessment
- fieldwork investigations that enable children to observe, record and interpret learning in meaningful contexts
- reflective activities that support children's self-awareness, decision-making and social skills
- small-group problem-solving activities where teachers use questioning and feedback to support reasoning, collaboration and the application of prior learning.

Assessment events

Assessment events are structured approaches to gathering evidence of learning and attainment through defined tasks, tests or tools. These may include teacher designed tests, standardised or diagnostic assessments, as well as presentations, performances or projects. Assessment events are usually planned, with children aware that assessment is taking place. The evidence gathered often provides a record of learning and attainment at points in time.

Assessment events support teachers in:

- reviewing progress and identifying patterns
- identifying areas requiring support or challenge
- informing future Learning Experiences
- communicating information with children, parents and others.

In practice, this may include:

- an independent writing task used to assess vocabulary, structure and conventions
- a journal entry documenting learning during an integrated STEM project
- a standardised or diagnostic assessment used alongside other evidence to inform supports and next steps
- a presentation or performance that enables children to demonstrate and celebrate their arts-making in authentic contexts.

Importantly, assessment events do not stand alone. They should be interpreted alongside intuitive assessment and planned interactions to support a more complete and responsive understanding of learning.

Spotlight on: Progression

Assessment and progression are a key principle in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Progression describes how children's learning deepens, broadens and becomes more sophisticated over time. It is developmental and non-linear, with children learning at different rates and in different ways. Revisiting and consolidating learning is a natural part of progression, particularly when children are developing new skills, dispositions or understanding. Variability in learning can provide valuable information and should inform responsive teaching and assessment.

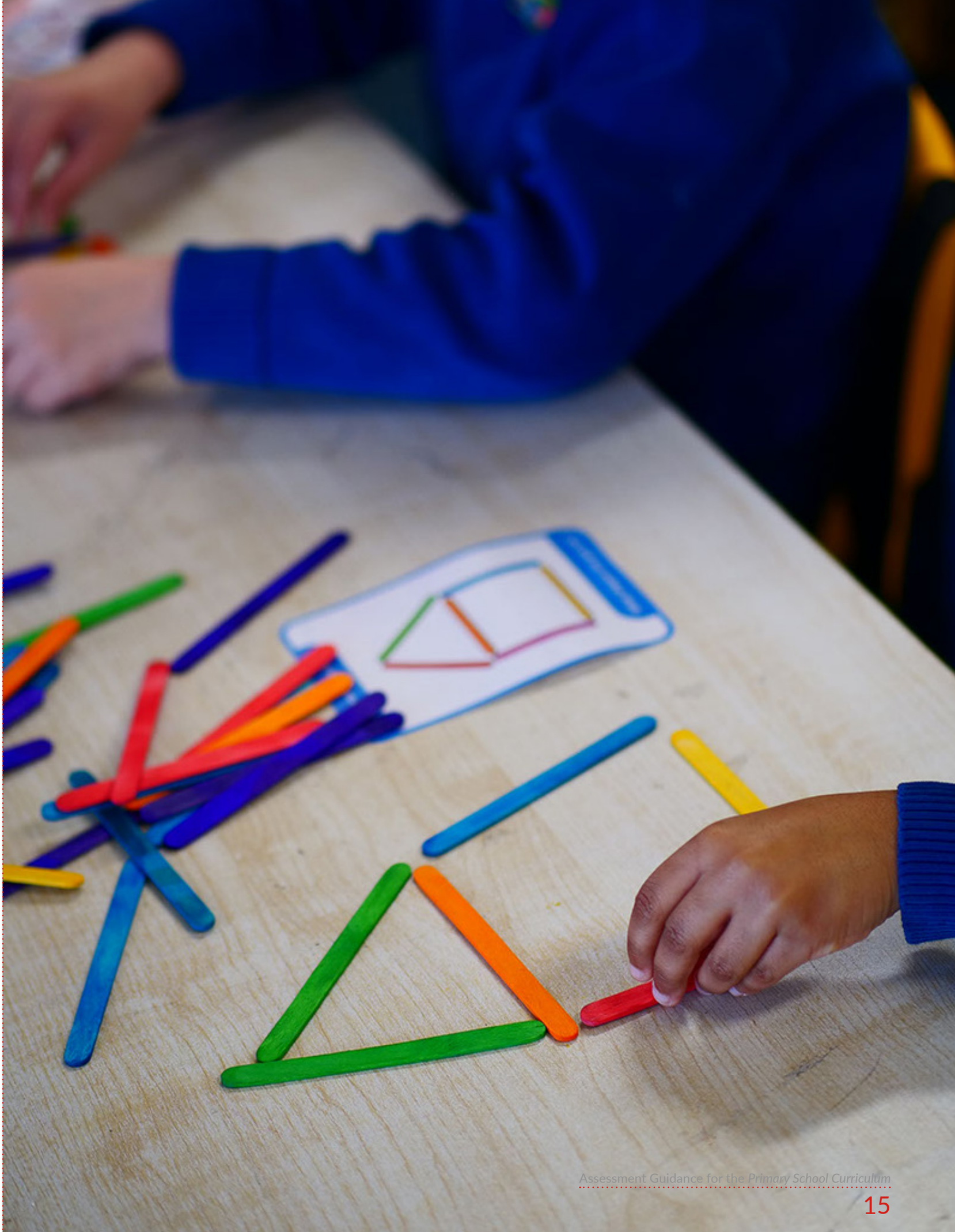
Progression becomes visible when children begin to:

- deepen understanding and apply learning in new contexts
- use strategies more effectively and reflect on learning
- show positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning
- grow in confidence, competence and independence
- participate more fully, collaborate with others and demonstrate increasing agency.

Teachers can support children's progression by:

- building on prior learning and knowledge
- revisiting, reinforcing and extending learning
- providing appropriate support and challenge
- observing learning over time and using assessment to inform next steps
- offering multiple ways for children to learn and demonstrate learning.

For some children, progression may initially involve participating in learning with significant adult support. Over time, increasing independence and a reduced need for support may also indicate progression.



6. Assessment Methods

Assessment methods help teachers and children gather, interpret and use evidence in ways that support learning. They are most effective when embedded in everyday classroom practice and selected for a clear purpose.

Assessment methods support the integration of assessment within classroom practice across the continuum of assessment. They do not sit in any one place on the continuum of assessment; rather, their position depends on how they are used in practice. No single method provides a complete picture of children's learning. Rather, teachers use a range of complementary methods and sources of evidence over time, guided by the child, the context and the Focus(es) of Learning.

Methods outlined in this chapter include:

- Conferencing
- Feedback
- Observation
- Peer- and self-assessment
- Portfolios
- Project-based learning
- Questioning
- Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria
- Standardised tests
- Teacher-designed tasks and tests.

Conferencing

Conferencing is purposeful dialogue between teachers and children – individually, in pairs or in small groups. It involves listening carefully, asking questions to clarify and extend thinking, providing feedback and encouraging reflection.

Conferencing is particularly valuable for:

- gaining deeper insight into children's thinking and understanding
- enabling children to communicate their thinking and take ownership of their learning
- supporting individualised, targeted feedback and responsive teaching
- strengthening relationships and trust in the learning process.

Conferencing is used:

- informally, through brief interactions during learning activities
- deliberately, through planned one-to-one or small group conversations
- responsively, to follow up on observations or emerging learning insights.

When is conferencing particularly useful?	For what purpose is conferencing particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	to explore children's prior knowledge, interests and assumptions
During learning	to probe and extend thinking in the moment or to offer responsive, personalised feedback that supports progression
At key points in a Learning Experience	to review and consolidate understanding, address misconceptions and agree meaningful next steps, often drawing on evidence from tasks, work samples or questioning
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	often alongside observation, to explore their reasoning, decision-making and use of strategies in depth
During reflection and review	to support children in articulating their learning, recognising progress and identifying future directions, complementing portfolio or peer- and self-assessment.

Table 6: Conferencing

Conferencing

Conferencing in practice

During a 5th class Geography lesson, Ms Ní Bhraonáin asks children to work in groups on a free recall task before beginning a project on an Irish river of their choice. Using large sheets of paper, the groups record what they already know about rivers from previous learning.

As Ms Ní Bhraonáin conferences with one group, she notices that the children confidently use vocabulary such as source, tributary, erosion and mouth. They sketch river features accurately and explain physical processes clearly but make few connections to the ways rivers affect people and communities

Rather than supplying additional information, Ms Ní Bhraonáin uses the conference to extend thinking through prompts such as:

- Why do you think many Irish towns developed beside rivers?
- How might rivers support farming or business?
- What might happen if a river became polluted?

Through discussion, she realises that while the children can recall factual information, they require further support in connecting physical geography with human and economic activity. In response, she adapts the next lesson to include short case studies and photographs linked to the River Shannon, focusing on transport, tourism, farming and hydroelectric power.

Feedback

Feedback is an integral part of assessment and learning. It is a timely and focused interaction that helps children recognise strengths, address misconceptions and identify next steps. It may be verbal, written, visual, gestural, digital, peer-led or dialogic.

Feedback is particularly valuable for:

- guiding children towards next steps in their learning
- building motivation, reinforcing effort and helping children recognise progress and achievement in relation to their own previous learning
- developing children's capacity to reflect on and take ownership of their learning
- recognising diverse ways of learning and demonstrating understanding
- informing decisions about future Learning Experiences and supports.

Feedback, when used effectively, is:

- timely and responsive, with teachers noticing and responding to children's thinking and understanding through prompts, questions and guidance
- dialogic and relational, supporting children to explain their thinking, ask questions and engage with feedback from teachers and peers
- forward-looking and focused on progression, helping children understand where they are in their learning and identify next steps to improve or extend their learning.

When is feedback particularly useful?	For what purpose is feedback particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	often linked to shared success criteria, to clarify expectations and support children in understanding what quality looks like
During learning	often emerging through questioning and observation, to guide progress and help children refine and improve their work
At key points in a Learning Experience	often informed by other assessment methods, to provide specific commentary on strengths, areas for development and next steps
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to support immediate adjustments, reinforce effective strategies and address misconceptions
During reflection and review	often alongside peer- and self-assessment or portfolios, to help children reflect on their learning, recognise progress and identify how they might improve or extend it.

Table 7: Feedback

Feedback

Feedback in practice

During a Stage 1 PE lesson, Múinteoir Aoife sets up a jumping activity in the hall. The children must travel from one side of the hall to the other and cross the 'forest' by jumping over various obstacles (e.g., cones, beanbags, small hurdles, hoops, etc.). The activity is designed to develop children's jumping skills and movement control.

As the children participate, Aoife provides immediate oral feedback based on observation. She notices that some children are rigid in their movements and not using their full bodies to help them jump for distance. To support them, she asks questions and gives specific prompts such as "How might our arms help us to jump?" and "Try swinging your arms back and then quickly forwards."

During the activity she also recognises children who are beginning to improve their jumps, e.g. "Ethan, I love the way you are starting crouched down like a tiger before exploding into your jumps."

As several children are at an early stage of control and coordination when jumping, Aoife pauses briefly for whole-class feedback. She models how crouching down and swinging her hands backwards and forwards helps her to add distance to a jump. Children are invited to try this themselves and notice if it also helps them improve their jumping during the subsequent athletics activities in the lesson.

Observation

Observations involve actively noticing and listening to children as learning unfolds. This includes what children communicate, do, show and make; how they approach tasks and solve problems; how they participate, interact and collaborate; and how they respond to challenge, feedback and support.

Observation is particularly valuable for:

- recognising how children demonstrate their learning through their actions and interactions
- recognising children as capable learners
- recognising learning that may not be evident through written or verbal responses alone
- enriching insights gathered through other methods, interpretation and response.

Observation is used:

- spontaneously, as learning unfolds during activities, play and interaction
- deliberately, to notice and pay attention to targeted aspects of learning
- over time, to identify patterns and build a broader picture of children's learning and progression.

When is observation particularly useful?	For what purpose is observation particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	often alongside questioning, to identify children's interests, prior experiences and entry points for learning
During learning	to monitor engagement and gather evidence of how children are developing understanding and skills, often informing feedback
At key points in a Learning Experience	to focus attention on aspects of learning and inform judgements about progress
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to capture how they approach learning, make decisions and apply strategies in context
During reflection and review	to notice how children represent and communicate their learning and respond to feedback.

Table 8: Observation

Observation

Observation in practice

During a Stage 3 Engineering lesson, children design and build a bridge prototype using recycled materials to hold a toy car. Before beginning, the class discuss the importance of improving designs through trial and error.

As the children build and test their prototypes, Múinteoir Seán observes how groups respond to challenges and refine their designs. He notices that some groups reflect on why their bridges succeeded or failed and use this information to make improvements. Other groups make multiple changes quickly and become frustrated when their bridges collapse.

From these observations, Múinteoir Seán recognises that many children understand the importance of testing designs but require further support in using trial and error to improve their ideas. He pauses the lesson and invites one group to demonstrate how they improved their bridge design. Using this example, he models appropriate language for the class: You noticed the bridge was unstable, so you strengthened the base."

Through prompts, children are encouraged to further reflect on the process in pairs and groups:

- "What did you learn from your first design?"
- "How did your changes improve the bridge?"

Using whiteboards, they discuss or draw in response to the prompt:

- "What might you try next?"

Drawing on evidence gathered through observation, Múinteoir Seán adapts the success criteria for the next lesson: I can improve my design by trying different ideas and learning from what happens.

Peer- and self-assessment

Peer- and self-assessment involves children reflecting on, sharing and discussing their learning within an open, respectful and supportive learning environment. Often supported and scaffolded by teachers using clear and shared success criteria or goals, these approaches support children to become active participants in the assessment process, developing reflection, collaboration and increasing ownership of their learning. They also support children to give and receive constructive, respectful feedback in ways that are appropriate to their communication and developmental stage.

Peer- and self-assessment are particularly valuable for:

- developing children's ability to reflect on and evaluate their own learning, including through supported or non-verbal forms of expression
- helping children recognise strengths, identify next steps and understand quality in learning
- encouraging collaboration, dialogue and shared responsibility for learning
- strengthening children's confidence, intrinsic motivation and sense of agency
- complementing or challenging insights gathered through other assessment methods.

Peer- and self- assessment are used:

- informally, through discussion and reflection during learning activities
- deliberately, through planned opportunities for children to review and respond to their own or others' work
- responsively, by encouraging children to reflect on feedback and identify next steps.

When is peer- and self-assessment particularly useful?	For what purpose is peer- and self-assessment particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	often using shared success criteria, to support children in understanding the Focus(es) of Learning and what quality learning looks like
During learning	often supported by feedback and questioning, to help children reflect on their personal strategies and approaches to learning and to make informed adjustments
At key points in a Learning Experience	to enable children to evaluate their work and identify specific improvements
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to support collaborative reflection, dialogue and shared understanding of quality learning
During reflection and review	sometimes linked to portfolios, to support children in recognising progress, taking ownership of their learning and identifying next steps.

Table 9: Peer- and self-assessment

Peer- and self-assessment in practice

Since the beginning of the year, Mr. Burke has supported the children in his 3rd class to engage in peer- and self- assessment as part of the writing process

Drawing on Haikus explored during poetry lessons, Mr. Burke and the children co-construct clear success criteria for their own writing:

- Nature-themed
- Three lines (Line 1–5 syllables; Line 2–7 syllables; Line 3–5 syllables)
- Uses descriptive language connected to the senses.

Children then read each other's work and exchange feedback with a partner using the success criteria. Mr. Burke supports discussion by providing sentence starters such as:

- "One thing that helped me picture the scene was…"
- "I wonder could you add more detail about…"

During one exchange, Amir's partner comments: "I can picture the birds, but maybe you could describe how they move." Amir realises that while his poem follows the correct syllable structure, he could strengthen the imagery for the reader. He revises the line: "Birds flying away" to "Small birds glide away."

Through peer- and self- assessment, children learn to reflect on quality, evaluate their choices and redraft purposefully. Mr. Burke also uses the feedback conversations to identify common needs across the class and plans a follow-up lesson on imagery and sensory language.

Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of a child's work, chosen and curated by the child, in collaboration with the teacher. It reflects their learning and development over time across different curriculum areas. Portfolios support reflection, goal setting and self-assessment, while foregrounding children's voices, perspectives, experiences and achievements. They may include spoken, signed, written, visual or digital artefacts such as drawings, recordings, photographs, projects and reflections and can take physical, digital or blended forms depending on the context and the needs of the child.

Portfolios are particularly valuable for:

- recognising and celebrating children's learning, progress and achievements
- supporting children to reflect on and make meaning of their Learning Experiences
- providing insight into children's interests, strengths and areas for development
- making learning visible through a range of artefacts and representations carefully and purposefully curated
- supporting inclusive assessment by valuing diverse and personally meaningful ways of expressing learning.

Portfolios are used:

- collaboratively, to support children in selecting artefacts that represent learning they value
- reflectively, through dialogue about children's choices and what they show about learning
- meaningfully, to help children make connections across Learning Experiences and reflect on their growth and progression over time.

When are portfolios particularly useful?	For what purpose are portfolios particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	to establish approaches for capturing and selecting learning that is meaningful to the child
During learning	To support children to recognise, articulate and celebrate how they learn and the progress they have made over time
At key points in a Learning Experience	to select, revisit and discuss artefacts that represent significant learning
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to capture diverse evidence of learning, development and/or progression in ways that are meaningful to the child
During reflection and review	often integrating peer- and self-assessment, to support children to recognise personal growth, to make connections across their learning and to share their learning with others.

Table 10: Portfolios

Portfolios

Portfolios in practice

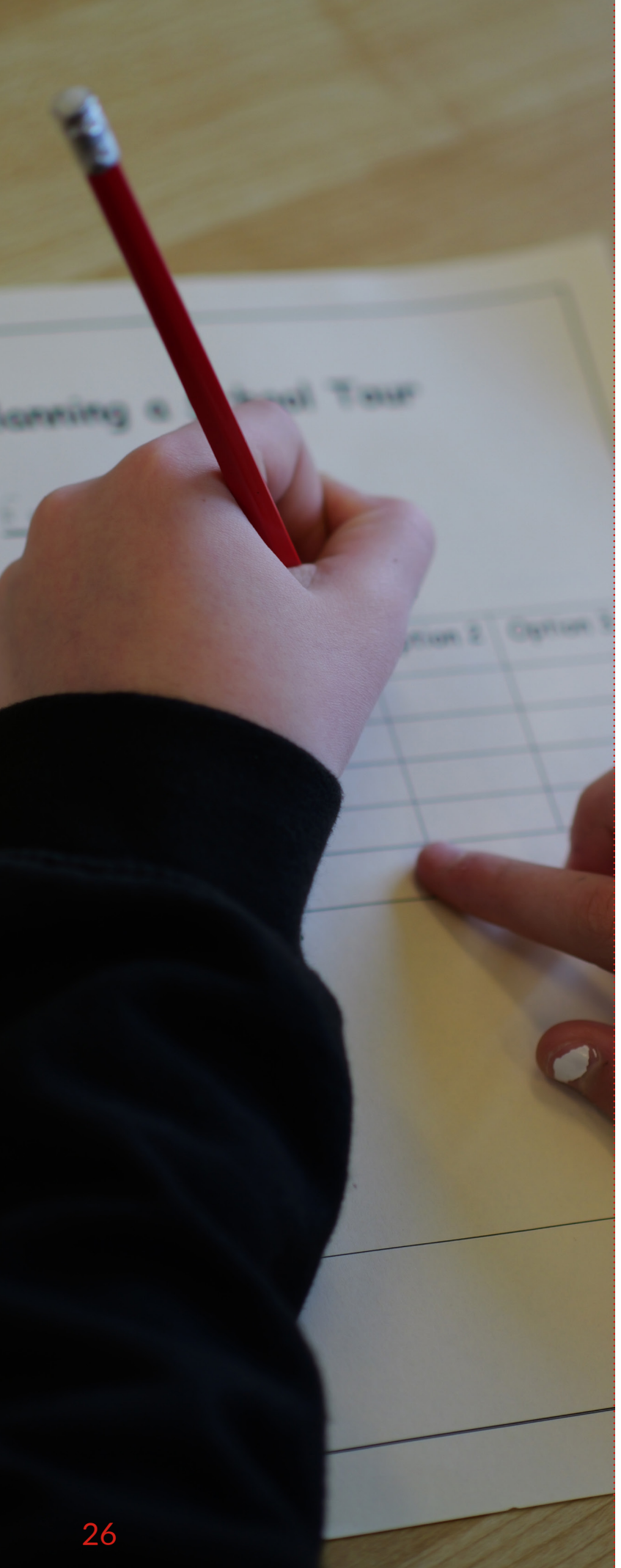
At the beginning of the year, Karen's 6th class discuss goals for learning and explore how a personal learning portfolio might help them document and celebrate their individual progress over time. Initially, Karen provides structured prompts to support reflection and selection of work. As the year progresses, responsibility gradually shifts to the children, who begin independently selecting work that demonstrates progress, challenge or personal achievement and linking it to specific learning goals.

Dónal enjoys Art and identifies improving his drawing skills as a personal goal for 6th class. He uses his portfolio to document progress by including photographs and samples of drawings alongside short reflections on techniques and improvements over time.

Amy has a strong interest in STEM and hopes to become an engineer. She creates a digital portfolio using speech-to-text and other digital tools to record and reflect on science experiments and engineering challenges. She also makes connections between her learning and studies of notable engineers and scientists in Science, Technology and Engineering Education.

Throughout the year, Karen encourages children to share reflections and observations about their learning with peers, parents and the teacher. She also supports children in identifying key competencies demonstrated through their work, helping to strengthen ownership, reflection and understanding of progression over time.

Towards the end of the year, children independently curate pieces they feel best represent them as learners and prepare short reflections to support transition conversations with their new teacher or post-primary school.



Project-based learning

Project-based learning enables children to show, represent and communicate their learning through sustained and extended inquiry-based or experiential learning tasks. As an assessment method, it provides rich insights into children's knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values, including their creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking and ability to apply learning across different and real-life contexts. It also supports child agency, choice and ownership of learning.

Project-based learning is particularly valuable for:

- providing a holistic view of children's learning (knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values)
- enabling children to demonstrate creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking
- encouraging child agency, choice and ownership of learning
- gaining insights into children's Key Competencies
- gaining insights into how children generalise their knowledge and skills across varying and real-life contexts.

Project-based learning is used:

- deliberately, through the design of extended Learning Experiences focused on meaningful questions, problems or areas of inquiry
- collaboratively, by supporting children to explore, create, present and share their learning individually and with others
- reflectively, through ongoing opportunities for feedback, discussion, refinement and self-reflection throughout the project
- responsively, by adapting projects in response to children's interests, thinking and emerging learning
- holistically, by drawing on evidence gathered throughout the project, alongside other assessment information, to develop a broader understanding of children's learning and progression.

When is project-based learning particularly useful?	For what purpose is project-based learning particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	often supported by questioning and shared success criteria, to establish the focus, purpose and direction of extended inquiry or investigation
During learning	often alongside observation and feedback, to monitor progress, make learning visible and support learning decisions
At key points in a Learning Experience	often alongside observation, feedback and conferencing, to review progress, refine work and deepen understanding through feedback and reflection
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	often drawing on other assessment methods to explore how they apply knowledge, skills and strategies
During reflection and review	sometimes linked to portfolios or peer- and self-assessment, to support children in evaluating their work, recognising achievements and identifying areas for further development.

Table 11: Project-based learning

Project-based learning

Project-based learning in practice

In a 4th class Modern Foreign Languages Learning Experience, Helen's class is building an awareness of language and cultures through project-based learning. They work in small groups to develop a project exploring cultures they've encountered or are interested in, including their own. Aspects of culture they may explore might include traditions, art, songs, festivals, etc. Children also explore stories, sayings, greetings and basic vocabulary. Children research and present their findings while showing how they gathered and organised evidence.

Once groups select their area of focus, Helen supports them in deciding how they would like to develop and present their project. Children choose from a range of approaches including:

- large posters
- digital presentations
- models
- visual displays and timelines.

Throughout the process, Helen conferences with groups, encouraging children to share their findings that they have come across and to reflect on how effectively they are working together. By engaging in project-based learning, children are supported to develop an awareness of a range of cultures that interest them. They also develop research, collaboration and communication skills.

Questioning

Questioning involves the use of well-crafted, open-ended, probing and prompting questions to elicit and explore evidence of children's learning through dialogue, interaction and engagement in Learning Experiences. Effective questioning encourages children to share ideas, explain their reasoning, make connections, consider different perspectives and reflect on their learning.

Questioning is particularly valuable for:

- making children's thinking and sense-making visible
- supporting children to explain their reasoning, consider and offer different perspectives and engage deeply with learning
- responding in real time to children's strengths, needs and misconceptions
- complementing and deepening insights gathered through other assessment methods
- supporting inclusive assessment through different ways of communicating, thinking and demonstrating understanding.

Questioning is used:

- spontaneously, in response to children's ideas and actions
- deliberately, to attend to specific aspects of the Focus(es) of Learning
- strategically, within interactions such as conferencing or feedback conversations, to deepen thinking, challenge assumptions and support progression.

When is questioning particularly useful?	For what purpose is questioning particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	to elicit prior knowledge, experiences and misconceptions and identify appropriate entry points for learning
During learning	often complementing observation and feedback, to monitor understanding, extend thinking and inform immediate teaching responses
At key points in a Learning Experience	to focus attention on important concepts, skills and processes
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to explore their reasoning, decision-making and application of learning
During reflection and review	often linked to portfolios or self- or peer-assessment, to support children in articulating their learning and identifying next steps.

Table 12: Questioning

Questioning

Questioning in practice

During a 5th class Gaeilge lesson exploring local environmental issues, Eve uses questioning to support children in expressing opinions and justifying ideas through Irish.

Using photographs and short prompts, she asks:

- "Cad iad na fadhbanna atá sa cheantar?"
- "Cad is féidir linn a dhéanamh chun cabhrú?"
- "Cén fáth a gceapann tú é sin?"

Children respond using phrases and extended sentences. Eve notices that while many children confidently share opinions, some rely heavily on memorised vocabulary and experience difficulty extending or justifying responses independently.

Drawing on this evidence, Eve models sentence structures and key vocabulary using visual prompts and collaborative discussion:

- "Sílim go bhfuil…"
- "Tá sé tábhachtach mar…"
- "D'fhéadfaimis…"

She also provides opportunities for paired discussion and supported oral rehearsal before whole-class sharing. Through questioning and dialogue, Eve gains insight into children's language development, confidence and ability to communicate ideas in Irish. She uses this information to adapt support and extend opportunities for oral language, participation and progression.

Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria

Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria are clear and accessible tools that support teachers and children in making learning visible and explicit. Shared success criteria describe what successful learning looks like in meaningful ways, checklists help children identify key aspects of learning, while rubrics provide more detailed descriptions of quality and progression. Most effective when co-created, clear, relevant and connected to the Focus(es) of Learning, these assessment methods support understanding, reflection, feedback and increasing ownership of learning.

Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria are particularly valuable for:

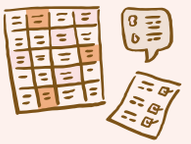
- clarifying expectations and supporting a shared understanding of the Focus(es) of Learning
- helping children recognise what quality looks like in their learning
- supporting reflection on strengths, areas for development and next steps in learning
- guiding feedback and informing future learning and teaching
- supporting consistency in assessment across different contexts.

Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria are used:

- collaboratively, by co-constructing or sharing success criteria to support a shared understanding of expectations and quality in learning
- reflectively, by using checklists or criteria during learning to guide focus, monitor progress and support self- and peer-assessment
- deliberately, by using rubrics to describe progression and support deeper understanding of quality in learning
- dialogically, through questioning, conferencing and discussion, to interpret and apply criteria in meaningful ways.

When are rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria particularly useful?	For what purpose are rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	often developed through discussion and questioning, to clarify learning intentions and establish a shared understanding of what success looks like
During learning	often used alongside feedback, to guide focus, support self-assessment and help children monitor their progress
At key points in a Learning Experience	to support judgements about quality and progression in learning
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to support decision-making and the meaningful application of criteria, often integrated with peer- and self-assessment.
During reflection and review	to support children in evaluating their work, recognising progress and identifying next steps, often used in conjunction with portfolios and feedback.

Table 13: Rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria



Rubrics, checklists, shared success criteria

Rubrics in practice

During a project on endangered species, Shane and his Stage 4 mixed class co-construct a rubric to support the development of video presentations. Together, they identify criteria relating to scientific understanding, use of evidence, communication and responding to peer feedback.

As Shane reviews Anita's video presentation on the hawksbill turtle, he uses the rubric to help interpret her learning rather than as a marking scheme. He notices that Anita explains the turtle's habitat and endangered status using appropriate scientific vocabulary. She strengthens her presentation by including a graph showing population decline and a labelled migration map.

Shane also recalls how Anita responded to peer feedback by adding a final slide suggesting actions people could take to help protect the species. Drawing on this evidence, Shane recognises that Anita has developed a strong understanding of both the scientific content and the purpose of persuasive communication. He identifies a next step in supporting Anita to explain more clearly why particular actions can make a difference and plans to model this explicitly in a follow-up lesson.

Shane also notices that several children experienced difficulty labelling graphs accurately. In response, he plans opportunities to revisit interpreting graphs and percentages during the next Maths lesson. Using a rubric, Shane supports children in developing shared understanding of quality, reflecting on feedback and identifying meaningful next steps in learning.

Standardised testing

During their time in school, children will take a number of standardised tests. Most are achievement tests, though some children may also take more specialised assessments - carried out by external professionals. Standardised testing provides structured and comparable information about some aspects of children's learning, while recognising that results represent only one source of evidence gathered at a particular point in time. It supports teachers in identifying patterns in strengths and areas for development and contributes to building a broader picture of children's attainment.

Standardised tests are particularly valuable for:

- identifying patterns in attainment across groups of children
- informing decisions about support provision and intervention
- informing preparation and planning at class, school or system level
- identifying strengths and areas where children may need additional support
- comparing performance over time or with national norms
- communicating with parents and other stakeholders.

Standardised testing is typically used in a planned and structured way, administered at specific points in the school year; conducted in line with established procedures to ensure consistency; and scored and interpreted using standardised guidelines. Where used, standardised tests should be administered, interpreted and scored as instructed in the test manual. If results show an anomaly between a child's score and teacher's expectation, it may be useful to review confidence intervals and measurement errors.

Effective use of standardised testing involves considering test results alongside other assessment information, including classroom-based evidence of learning, to identify patterns and trends or patterns over time. Standardised tests are most meaningful when used as one source of evidence within a broader understanding of the child's learning and experiences.

When is standardised testing particularly useful?	For what purpose is standardised testing particularly useful?
At identified points in the school year	to provide a structured snapshot of children's performance in specific areas
Over time	to track patterns in attainment and monitor progress across year groups, complementing other longitudinal evidence
At key points in planning and review	To consider a child's performance relative to national patterns of achievement, offering increased precision about specific aspects of learning
When sharing information	to contribute to a broader, shared understanding of learning with parents and other stakeholders, alongside classroom-based evidence of learning
At system level	to contribute to a broader understanding of patterns in attainment and to inform policy, planning and resource allocation.

Table 14: Standardised testing

Standardised testing

Standardised testing in practice

Teachers in St Brigid's NS administer standardised tests in English reading in line with school procedures and national guidance. The results are considered alongside classroom-based evidence of learning, including observations, reading conferences, work samples and ongoing assessment information.

Following detailed analysis of the standardised reading test results, Ms Nowak notices that while many children in her 2nd class can decode words accurately, some experience difficulty with vocabulary and reading comprehension, particularly when reading unfamiliar texts independently.

Drawing on this evidence, Ms Nowak reviews children's reading journals, guided reading notes and oral language activities. She notices similar patterns during classroom discussions, where some children can recall information directly from a text but require additional support to explain word meanings, infer meaning and discuss characters or events in greater detail.

Using insights gathered from both standardised testing and classroom-based assessment, Ms Nowak plans opportunities to:

- strengthen vocabulary development through shared reading and oral language activities
- provide additional support in discussing and interpreting texts
- model comprehension methods such as predicting, questioning and summarising
- increase opportunities for children to explain and justify their thinking during reading activities
- communicate with next year's teacher to inform continuity of learning, development and progression for the children.

At whole-school level, staff review patterns across year groups and identify vocabulary and comprehension as areas for ongoing focus within literacy planning.

When meeting with and reporting to parents, Ms Nowak uses the test results alongside classroom-based evidence to support discussion about children's strengths, progress and next steps in reading.

Spotlight on: Norm-referenced assessment scores

Norm-referenced assessments compare a child's performance with that of a representative group of children of a similar age or class level. They provide information about a child's relative performance and may help identify patterns in attainment over time. Used thoughtfully, norm-referenced assessment information can support more informed decisions about learning, teaching and support.

When interpreting norm-referenced assessment information, it is important to remember that:

- scores are normed against the performance of a wider group of children of a similar age or class level, typically drawn from particular populations and demographic groups
- scores reflect performance at a particular point in time
- scores provide an estimate of performance rather than an exact measure of learning
- scores should be interpreted carefully, recognising that assessments vary in their reliability (the consistency of results) and validity (how appropriate and meaningful the assessment is for understanding children's learning)
- some variation in scores over time is normal
- performance may be influenced by factors such as anxiety, concentration, fatigue, language demands, confidence or familiarity with the assessment format
- low scores should be explored further rather than interpreted in isolation.

When discussing results with parents or guardians, teachers may need to explain that norm-referenced assessment information provides only one perspective on children's learning and progression.

Teacher-designed tasks and tests

Teacher-designed tasks and tests are planned assessment approaches that enable teachers to gather focused evidence of children's learning in relation to specific aspects of the Focus(es) of Learning. Tasks may take a wide range of forms, including written, spoken, signed, practical, performance-based or multi-modal activities, while tests are typically more structured and designed to assess targeted aspects of learning. When aligned with success criteria for clarity and consistency, these assessment methods can be designed to reflect the learning context and suit the strengths of children. In doing so, they provide meaningful and accessible opportunities for children to show, represent, and communicate their learning.

Teacher-designed tasks and tests are particularly valuable for:

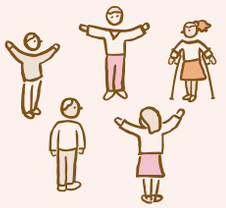
- gathering focused evidence of children's learning in relation to the Focus(es) of Learning
- identifying strengths, misconceptions and areas for development
- supporting children to demonstrate their learning through meaningful forms of expression and representation
- guiding feedback and informing future learning, teaching, support and progression
- contributing, alongside other assessment methods, to a broader understanding of children's learning.

Teacher-designed tasks and tests are used:

- in both planned and responsive ways
- deliberately, by designing tasks or tests aligned with the Focus(es) of Learning
- flexibly, adapting tasks to suit the context, purpose and needs of the children
- responsively, using evidence and results to inform next steps.

When are teacher-designed tasks and tests particularly useful?	For what purpose are teacher-designed tasks and tests particularly useful?
At the beginning of learning	*where appropriate*, to identify prior knowledge, understanding or skills in relation to specific learning goals, often complemented by questioning
During learning	often alongside observation and feedback, to check understanding, identify misconceptions and guide teaching
At key points in a Learning Experience	to gather focused evidence of progress in relation to particular aspects of learning
When children are engaged in activities, tasks, inquiry or problem-solving	to provide structured opportunities to demonstrate learning in different ways, often supported by rubrics, checklists and shared success criteria
During reflection and review	to support interpretation of outcomes and inform next steps.

Table 15: Teacher-designed tasks and tests



Teacher-designed tasks and tests

Teacher-designed tasks and tests in practice

Ms Sawyer uses a teacher-designed task to assess her 2nd class children's understanding of life in the past and their report-writing skills. The task also supports assessment of children's ability to organise information clearly and use appropriate subject-specific vocabulary.

During the first lesson, each child selects a topic linked to life in the past, such as schools, homes, toys or transport. Children complete a graphic organiser with headings including:

- Then and now
- Materials used
- Daily life
- Similarities and differences.

Where children are unsure of information, they use books, photographs and digital tools to support research.

In the second lesson, children use their graphic organisers to write a short report using appropriate headings and vocabulary. Some children handwrite their reports while others use speech-to-text tools to support access and fluency.

As children work, Ms Sawyer observes and records brief notes linked to the success criteria, including:

- organisation of ideas
- use of headings
- clarity of expression
- use of historical vocabulary
- ability to compare past and present.

After the task, Ms Sawyer reviews the reports and graphic organisers and records reflections in her assessment notes. For example, she notices that Sofia's report is clearly organised and includes descriptive detail but contains limited comparison between life in the past and life today. She also notices that some ideas included in Sofia's graphic organiser were not developed in her written report. Drawing on this evidence, Ms Sawyer plans a follow-up lesson to revisit comparative language and model how research notes can be developed into more detailed report writing.

Spotlight on: Using criterion-referenced assessments effectively

Criterion-referenced assessments focus on how children's learning aligns with clear expectations or criteria. Criteria are ideally identified by the teacher and, where appropriate, developed with children. They typically reflect the knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values central to the Focus(es) of Learning.

In practice, criterion-referenced assessment involves:

- clarifying the Focus(es) of Learning and what children are expected to demonstrate
- developing success criteria that support a shared understanding of learning
- gathering and interpreting assessment information from the assessment
- deducing and using evidence to identify next steps.

To develop and use criterion-referenced assessments effectively, teachers may consider:

- Does the assessment clearly connect to the Focus(es) of Learning?
- Does the criteria for this assessment focus on the most significant aspects of learning rather than everything that could be assessed?
- Are the criteria clear, specific and understandable to children?
- How can the assessment be made meaningful and accessible for children?
- How will the evidence gathered be used to inform feedback, support and next steps in learning?
- What opportunities are provided for children to reflect on the outcomes of the assessment?

7. Exemplars of Assessment in Practice

The exemplars in this section illustrate how different aspects of this guidance may come together in practice across a range of contexts. They are not intended as models to be replicated in full, nor do they represent expectations for every lesson or Learning Experience. Teachers will make assessment decisions in different ways, depending on the children, context, Focus(es) of Learning and their professional judgement.

Exemplar A:
Building a picture of children as learners at points across the school year

Context for Exemplar A	
Key message	Assessment is an ongoing integrated process that builds a rich understanding of children as learners over time.
Teacher	Múinteoir Rachel
Class context	• Rural primary school; multi-grade class (4th, 5th and 6th) • 28 children with a range of strengths, interests and neurodivergent learning profiles • Some children require additional support with language, social interaction or self-regulation, while others demonstrate high levels of agency and creativity in their learning.

At the beginning of the year: Establishing a starting point [P, I, C]

At the beginning of the year, Rachel focuses on developing her knowledge of each child. She draws on multiple sources of evidence to build an initial understanding of children's strengths, interests, motivations and support needs.

Source of evidence	What this may look like in practice
Dialogue with the previous teacher, parents, SET teachers and other professionals	Professional conversation to establish child's prior learning, strengths, interests, motivations and preferences for learning.
Early observation and interaction of children in initial settling-in activities	Daily morning meeting, collaborative group activities, play and informal discussions.
Children's own perspectives on their learning	Self-reflection tools e.g., All about me (NCSE Relate); Thoughts about School (NEPS); drawing, visual expression and choice boards.
Portfolio samples	Children sharing and discussing work they are proud of from the previous year.

Table 16: Evidence to build initial understanding of children's strengths, motivations and support needs

Using these sources Rachel elicits the children's views on what they enjoy, what they find challenging and what helps them to learn. Rachel uses these interactions to identify appropriate starting points for learning and to notice early patterns in how children engage, communicate and respond to challenge.

Throughout the year

Creating a culture of shared learning [E, I]

Rachel regularly creates opportunities for children to share, reflect on and celebrate their learning. This helps create a classroom culture where learning is visible and different ways of learning are valued.

Assessment method	What this may look like in practice
Peer assessment	Children use structured prompts to give and receive feedback during learning activities. • Giving feedback, these include: "One thing that worked really well was…", "I really like the way you…" and "This could be even better if…" • Receiving feedback, these include: "How can I do that?" and "What could I focus on next?"
Teacher-designed task	Following a series of Learning Experiences exploring the solar system, children work in pairs to create an interactive classroom wall display focusing on what they have learned.

Table 17: Assessment to create a culture of shared learning

Through inclusive Learning Experiences [P, I]

Rachel ensures children have multiple and meaningful ways to demonstrate, express and represent their learning through:

- talk and other forms of communication
- play and hands-on activity
- visual and creative expression
- collaborative work.

Through the Continuum of Assessment [E, P, C]

Rachel draws on a range of approaches across the continuum of assessment to gather evidence of learning over time. For example:

Context for assessment	What this may look like in practice
Intuitive assessment	During a Maths lesson on measuring angles, Rachel observes whether children are using the correct scale on the protractor when measuring.
Planned interactions	Using a rubric linked to success criteria, children identify the aspects of measuring angles that they may need to work on. Rachel uses this information to plan the next lessons.
Assessment events	At the end of the unit of learning, children complete a short teacher designed task measuring angles independently. Rachel conferences with children about their learning and next steps.

Table 18: Gathering evidence of learning across the continuum of assessment

Using insights to inform and support responsive teaching and teacher agency [E, P]

Rachel uses evidence from different contexts to identify patterns, adapt supports and plan next steps.

This enables her to:

- identify patterns in learning and progression
- respond to strengths and potential barriers
- adapt Learning Experiences, supports and levels of challenge
- plan meaningful and motivating next steps.

Over time, the children become more confident in reflecting on progress and identifying next steps.

Spotlight on: Assessing the range of strengths and needs in a class

Teachers work with groups of children with diverse strengths, needs, interests and circumstances. Across the continuum of assessment, information should be generated and gathered in purposeful ways, proportionate to its intended use, to help teachers make practical decisions about where support, challenge or adaptation may be most needed across the class at a given time.

In practice, this may involve:

- identifying where additional support, scaffolding or challenge may be needed
- recognising patterns in participation, engagement and progression across the class
- adapting supports, routines, pacing or Learning Experiences in response to children's strengths and needs
- drawing on children's interests and motivations to support participation and progression
- prioritising the most significant assessment information to inform next steps.

Exemplar B:
Assessment at the foundational stages of learning and regulation

Context for Exemplar B	
Key message	Assessment at foundational stages begins with relationships, trust and deep knowledge of each child, using evidence gathered over time to understand readiness to learn, support participation and regulation and identify meaningful next steps.
Teacher	Pádraig
Class context	• Class of 5 children in a Special School for moderate/severe intellectual disability • Children engage, learn and communicate in a range of ways with some using additional communication tools • Pádraig works closely with children, parents, special needs assistants and the Children's Disability Network Team to support coordinated approaches to learning and wellbeing.

At the beginning of the year: Establishing a starting point [P, I, C]

Building relationships, sharing relevant information and developing knowledge of children [P, I, C]

'To fully support students, we first need to know about them and understand where they are coming from' – NCSE, Relate, (p. 45).

Pádraig prioritises communication, relationships, safety and trust with the classroom environment and engages children with playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

Developing an initial understanding of each child in the class

At the beginning of the year, Pádraig focuses on developing his knowledge of each child by using a range of sources of evidence.

Source of evidence	What this may look like in practice
Information from children	Self-reflection tools e.g., All about me (NCSE Relate), Thoughts about School (NEPS), portfolio entries and choice boards that support teachers to understand children's strengths, interests, motivations and preferences.
Information from parents	Conversations and written information e.g., Getting to know me (NCSE Relate), communication passport telling teacher more about how the child, communication styles and preferences.
Information from adults who have worked with the child	Professional conversations and reports relating to language, communication, regulation and supports.
Information from teacher's own observations	Noticing children's interests, motivations, communication preferences and relationships within the school environment.

Table 19: Evidence to build initial understanding of children's strengths, motivations and support needs at foundational stages of learning and regulation

Pádraig also shares relevant information about his background and experiences to help foster connection, familiarity and trust.

Examples of assessment throughout the year across the continuum of assessment

Assessment supports learning, participation and communication. Padráig considers each child's readiness to learn in line with broader policy guidance on inclusion, for example, NCSE Relate and NEPS Continuum of Support; and provides meaningful ways for children to engage with and demonstrate their learning.

Context for assessment	What this may look like in practice
Intuitive assessment	• Unplanned observations of children's behaviour, learning and interactions to ascertain what supported success in their learning. (Noting these observations can be a useful support for working towards targets within their SSP).
Planned interactions	• Sharing the Focus(es) of Learning, success criteria and engaging children in self-assessment, goal setting or reflection, insofar as possible, with use of visual supports and scaffolded communication to support children's engagement, as appropriate • Focused observations of behaviours (e.g., time on task) or learning • Using checklists or rubrics to keep track of behaviours, learning and engagement • Conferencing to gain insights into what behaviours might be communicating and barriers to learning • Teacher recognising and affirming learning and development and providing positive feedback and reinforcement to children.
Assessment events	• Events for attending to and recording small incremental milestones • Standardised assessments, as applicable • Diagnostic assessments.

Table 20: Supporting children in working towards the targets in their SSP along the continuum of assessment

By drawing on evidence gathered across the continuum of assessment over time and across contexts, Pádraig develops an evolving understanding of each child's learning and development.

This helps him to:

- recognise children's strengths, motivations and preferred ways of communicating
- identify supports and environments that promote engagement and success
- notice small but discernible progress over time
- adapt Learning Experiences and supports responsively
- collaborate effectively with parents and external professionals
- support children's participation and agency in learning.

Over time, assessment supports Pádraig in making responsive decisions about learning, teaching and support in ways that are meaningful for each child in the class.

Exemplar C:
Assessment decision-making as central to practice: Assessment processes in action

Context for Exemplar C	
Key message	The value of assessment lies not simply in noticing and gathering information, but in how teachers interpret and use evidence to move learning forward.
Teacher	Ms Ruane
Class context	• Multi-grade 1st and 2nd class comprising 26 children • The class includes a range of strengths and interests. One child has a visual impairment and two children from a migrant background are developing English proficiency • Ms Ruane plans for varied levels of support, ensuring that tasks are accessible through visual, oral and hands-on approaches, with language demands carefully scaffolded.
Focus(es of Learning [Curriculum context]	To strengthen scientific inquiry plans, with particular emphasis on sequencing steps logically and recognising what should remain the same in a fair test. [STEM Stage: 2 Strand: Energy and Forces]

Following reflection on a previous scientific inquiry and review of children's STEM journals, Ms Ruane notices that many children would benefit from greater support in sequencing and structuring inquiry plans. This is particularly evident for the children developing proficiency in English and for the child with a visual impairment, who benefits from alternative ways to access and represent planning.

Drawing on prior assessment information, Ms Ruane considers:

- What does this evidence suggest children understand or can do?
- Which aspects of inquiry plans are developing well, and which require further support?
- How can children represent their planning in different ways?
- What specific supports (e.g., visual, oral, tactile, digital technologies) will support greater participation and engagement?
- What pedagogical and assessment approaches have supported learning effectively to date?
- What should be prioritised next?

These considerations support Ms Ruane to clarify the Focus(es) of Learning and assessment:

To strengthen scientific inquiry plans, with particular emphasis on sequencing steps logically and recognising what should remain the same in a fair test.

Notice and gather [P, I, C]

Children work in small groups to plan an inquiry based on the question *"Which surface will help the toy car to move the fastest?"*

The children decide to investigate the effect that different types of surfaces have on movement. As the children plan, Ms Ruane intentionally notices and gathers evidence aligned with the Focus(es) of Learning, paying deliberate attention to:

- how children organise and sequence their ideas
- how children identify what should be kept the same.

She uses questioning and prompts to elicit and extend thinking:

- Can you show your steps in order?
- What will you need to carry out your investigation?
- If you are changing the surface, what should stay the same?

She provides multiple ways for children to demonstrate and communicate their thinking through:

- peer discussion and collaborative planning
- drawing and labelling plans
- visual and tactile supports
- recording ideas using digital devices, where appropriate.

Interpret and respond [E, P, I]

As the children engage in planning, Ms Ruane considers the evidence gathered through observation, interaction and discussion.

Examples of children's responses	Evidence of learning
"First we put the ramp on the table, then we put the car on the ramp and roll it."	Some children can clearly sequence steps, while others focus mainly on the activity.
"Let's get lots of cars and put them on the table and the floor and on the grass outside."	Some children focus mainly on the activity.
"I think that the car we use should stay the same."	Understanding of fair testing is emerging.
"Maybe we should use a car and a ball."	Some children require further support with fair testing.

Table 21: Interpreting children's responses

Interpreting this evidence, Ms Ruane decides that the children would benefit from:

- more explicit modelling of how to structure and sequence an inquiry plan
- additional scaffolding to support understanding of fair testing.

Her responsive teaching approaches are outlined below in Table 22.

Responsive teaching approach	What this involves in practice
Modelling a clear, step-by-step plan using a shared example	Using visuals and oral language to co-construct a plan with the class using sequencing language and action or 'bossy' verbs.
Providing visual supports for sequencing and recording	Children organise picture cards showing stages of the investigation.
Modelling fair-testing	"We only change one thing and keep everything else the same, so we know what caused the result."
Encouraging peer discussion and reflection	"Are you going to change anything in your group plan?"

Table 22: Responsive teaching in practice

As children carry out their investigations, Ms Ruane continues to observe:

- how effectively the children follow the sequence of their plans
- how the children apply the concept of fair testing during the investigation.

Informing the Focus(es) of Learning [E, P]

Drawing on patterns observed across children's planning and investigation work, she also recognises that many children would now benefit from further support in interpreting and communicating their findings in meaningful ways.

This informs the next Focus of Learning and assessment: Children will make sense of their findings and communicate what they have learned.

Exemplar D:
Using assessment methods purposefully and in complementary ways

Context for Exemplar D	
Key message	Meaningful assessment insights are gained when teachers use a purposeful combination of methods to make learning visible, involve children in reflection and inform responsive next steps.
Teacher	Alan
Class context	• Mixed Junior and Senior Infants class comprising 19 children with a wide range of experiences, interests and developmental stages • Some children are at an earlier stage of language development or less confident in group activities, while others readily express themselves through talk, movement and imaginative play • Múinteoir Alan recognises that children demonstrate understanding in different ways and plans flexibly and responsively, ensuring all children can engage in open-ended ways appropriate to their stage of development.
Focus(es) of Learning [Curriculum context]	Children adapt, co-create and improvise simple stories and characters using voice, space and tension, while developing awareness of role, character, movement and sound. [Arts Education: Stage 1 (Drama)]

Making learning visible [E, P, I, C]

At the beginning of the lesson, Alan introduces the Focus of Learning in child-friendly language: "We are learning to use our bodies, voices and imagination to show ideas and feelings."

Together, the class co-constructs simple success criteria:

- "I can use my imagination and pretend to be someone else"
- "I can use my body to show a character"
- "I can use my voice to express feelings."

The success criteria are represented visually and revisited throughout the lesson. Alan uses modelling, gestures and demonstrations to support participation and understanding, particularly for younger children and those developing language proficiency: "How can we show the wolf's ears?" and "Let's all make the sound of a pig squeal/oink."

Eliciting children's thinking [P, I, C]

Using the familiar story of *The Three Little Pigs*, children explore characters, emotions and events through mime, freeze-frame and movement. The familiar story supports all children to participate, including those who benefit from concrete experiences and repetition.

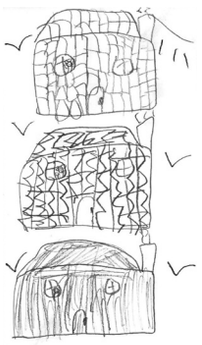
Alan begins by retelling parts of the story and invites children to respond: "What happens next?" and "Let's all huff and puff and blow the house down."

To warm up for the drama activity, Alan asks the children to move around the space pretending to be different animals, exploring how each one moves and sounds and inviting the children to suggest animals themselves.

Alan then guides the children through a narrative mime of key moments in the story: "The pigs were gathering straw to build the walls of the house", "These bricks are very heavy so three pigs have to work together to lift them" or "The three little pigs are tired and thirsty."

Children create freeze-frames to represent important moments in the story, such as:

The pigs hiding inside their houses



The wolf trying to blow the house down

The pigs feeling safe in the brick house at the end

Figure 4: Important moments in the story that children may represent through freeze-frames

Alan invites the children to bring their freeze-frames to life using movement and sound. He uses prompts such as:

- "Show us how your pig is feeling while building the house"
- "Show us how the wolf moves through the forest"
- "Show us how the pigs feel when the wolf arrives."

Through questioning, observation and interaction, Alan gathers evidence of children's:

- expressive abilities and confidence to participate
- imagination and creativity in using voice, sound, place and space
- ability to use their bodies to act out events.

He records significant moments through brief observational notes and photographs to support later reflection. Alan is attentive to the different ways children communicate through talk, gesture, movement, expression and reflection and supports less confident children to contribute in ways that suit them.

Actively involving children in assessment [E, I, C]

Following the activity, children reflect on and respond to one another's' work using photographs and shared discussion. by reflecting on the images.

Alan prompts reflection using questions such as:

- "What is your favourite piece of movement in this image?"
- "How would someone know who the wolf is and who the little pig is?"
- "What would you like to try next time?"

Children reflect on their learning in developmentally appropriate ways through:

- describing their role or actions during the drama activity
- using visual cues or thumbs up/down to indicate participation and enjoyment
- discussing what other stories they would like to dramatise in the future.

Using evidence to inform next steps [E, I, C]

Notice and gather (What did he see or hear?)	Interpret (What might this suggest about the child's learning?)	Respond (What response, support or next step might help?)
• observations of participation and engagement • children's creative use of voice, movement and expression • notes relating to collaboration, confidence and playful use of imagination.	• many children used voice and movement • expressively to portray action and character • some children would benefit from further support in using voice and movement expressively • confidence levels vary, with some children hesitant to participate in larger groups while others readily take leadership roles.	• focused drama warm-up activities to develop the use of voice and movement more expressively • opportunities for children to explore drama in smaller, supportive groups before sharing with the whole class • continued use of stories and structured play contexts to support children developing confidence and expressive language.

Table 23: Interpreting and making sense of assessment information in practice

Through ongoing observation, interaction and reflection, assessment becomes an integrated part of the Drama Learning Experience. It supports each child to participate, be creative and develop confidence in Drama at their own stage of development.

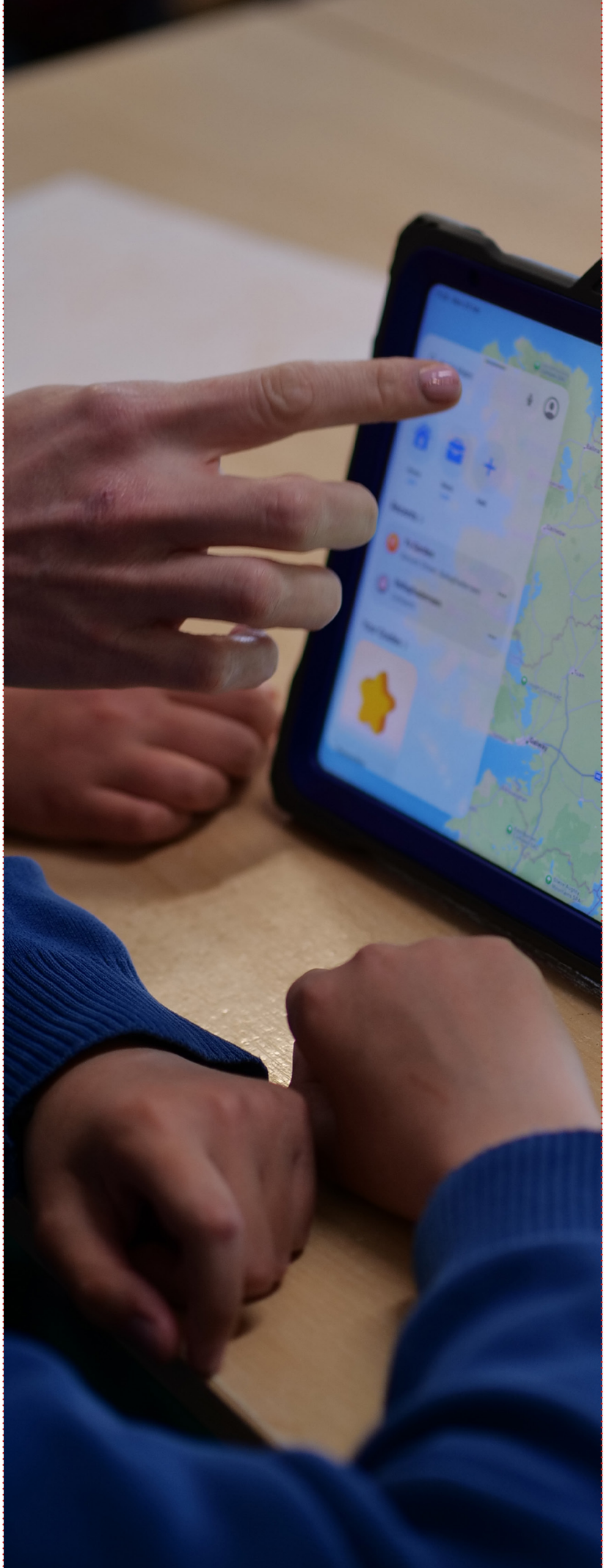
Spotlight on: Triangulating assessment information and sources

Triangulation involves gathering assessment information from a variety of sources to identify relevant evidence of learning, development and/or progression. It supports responsive teaching by strengthening teachers' decision-making, enabling them to identify next steps and adjust Learning Experiences.

When evidence from different sources aligns, it can provide confidence in decisions about next steps in learning. Where evidence does not align, it can prompt teachers to look more deeply at the learning context, the assessment approach used or the supports and opportunities available to the child.

In practice, some considerations for teachers include:

- Drawing on multiple sources of assessment information, including artefacts of children's own learning
- Considering learning over time and across contexts, noticing patterns in how children engage, progress and respond to different experiences
- Using anomalies in assessment evidence as a prompt for reflection (e.g., what might this be telling me about the learning task, the environment or the way the learning is being supported?)
- Using triangulated assessment information to inform responsive teaching decisions, including adjustments to Learning Experiences, supports and expectations.



Exemplar E:
Empowering children as learners through assessment

Context for Exemplar E	
Key message	Assessment can empower children as learners when they are supported to make choices, use varied representations, reflect on evidence of their learning, development and identify next steps.
Teacher	Ms. Hassan
Class context	• Urban primary school; 3rd class comprising 28 children with a wide range of strengths, interests and learning needs • Children demonstrate varying levels of confidence, independence and attainment in mathematics, with some requiring additional support and scaffolding while others readily engage with challenge and extension • Ms Hassan supports children to participate meaningfully in learning and assessment through dialogue, collaboration, exploration, choice and the use of varied representations and approaches to learning.
Focus(es) of Learning [Curriculum context]	Investigating, comparing and explaining equivalent fractions using a range of representations, models and mathematical language [Maths: Stage 3 — Fractions]

Supporting children to understand themselves as learners [E, P, I]

At the beginning of the lesson, Ms Hassan presents one-half and two-quarters using fraction models and asks: "What do you notice?" and "Do you think these fractions are equivalent? Why?

Examples of children's responses include:

- "They cover the same amount."
- "Two-quarters has more equal parts."
- "They are equal."
- "Three-sixths is the same as one-half too."

Drawing on the discussion, Ms Hassan shares the success criteria for their learning today.

- We can represent equivalent fractions in different ways
- We can explain how we know fractions are equivalent
- We can compare different representations.

The success criteria are revisited throughout the lesson to support children in recognising and discussing their learning.

Supporting children to make choices about learning and assessment [Empowering, Inclusive, Collaborative]

Children also explore equivalent fractions through collaborative games and problem-solving challenges, supporting discussion, reasoning and playful engagement with mathematical ideas. They investigate from a range of materials and representations provided, including fraction walls and fraction strips; paper folding; drawings and diagrams; number lines; and digital tools.

Examples of children's approaches include:

- comparing one-half and two-quarters using fraction strips
- folding shapes into equal parts
- representing equivalent fractions on number lines
- explaining thinking using drawings and mathematical language.

Ms Hassan encourages children to reflect on the strategies and representations they choose.

Examples of children's responses include:

- "The fraction wall helped me compare them"
- "Folding the paper helped me check if the parts were equal"
- "Drawing helped me explain my thinking"
- "I changed my thinking after talking with my partner."

Children also discuss ways they might keep evidence of learning through photographs, diagrams and Maths journals. Children have the option to add chosen artefacts to their portfolios.

Supporting children to recognise and discuss learning [E, I, C]

As the lesson progresses, Ms Hassan invites children to compare and discuss representations displayed around the classroom. She asks: "How do you know these fractions are equivalent?" "What is changing? What is staying the same?"

Children reflect on their learning using prompts linked to the success criteria:

- I represented equivalent fractions in different ways
- I explained my thinking
- I used a new strategy
- I compared my ideas with others.

Examples of children's responses include:

- "They are the same amount even if they look different"
- "The pieces are smaller but there are more of them"
- "The numerator and denominator both changed"
- "If both numbers double, the fraction stays equal."

Through discussion and reflection, children develop increasing confidence in explaining mathematical thinking and recognising patterns in learning.

Using assessment to support next steps in learning [E, P]

Following the lesson, Ms Hassan notices that many children can identify equivalent fractions using concrete materials and diagrams, while some require further support in explaining why fractions are equivalent using mathematical language.

Drawing on this evidence, she plans future learning opportunities for children to:

- explain equivalence using mathematical vocabulary
- justify thinking using visual models
- explore relationships and patterns in equivalent fractions.

Exemplar F:
Practical and purposeful approaches to recording and using assessment information in collaborative and responsive ways

Context for Exemplar F	
Key message	Purposeful recording captures significant evidence that informs responsive preparation and teaching, supports continuity of learning and enables co-ordinated support.
Teacher	Ms. Patel
Class context	• Special class for children in 1st, 2nd and 3rd class • Children have a range of neurodivergent needs and are engaging in a Wellbeing Learning Experience focused on recognising and communicating emotions • The Learning Experience includes visuals, emotion cards, sensory supports and structured paired interactions.
Focus(es) of Learning [Curriculum context]	Children are developing their ability to: • recognise and identify emotions in themselves and others • communicate feelings in ways that are meaningful to them • participate in supported shared interactions with increasing confidence.

Capturing significant evidence in practice

Throughout the Learning Experience, Ms Patel observes how children respond to different supports and opportunities for communication. Some children use visual cards to identify emotions, while others communicate through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, gestures, facial expressions, body language, movement, sounds or single words. Some children are non-speaking and communicate in individual and multimodal ways.

During a paired activity, Ms Patel notices that one child independently selects an emotion card to communicate feeling overwhelmed and moves to a sensory regulation space with minimal prompting. She also notices that another child, who would typically avoid peer interaction, remains engaged in a shared turn-taking activity for several minutes with adult support and access to noise-reducing headphones.

Purposeful recording and sharing

Ms Patel briefly notes these significant moments after the lesson, focusing on information that will support future planning and continuity of support. She records:

- that one child is beginning to independently communicate emotional needs using visual supports
- that another child is showing increased participation in shared interaction when activities are predictable and sensory supports are available.

She does not record every interaction, response or support used during the Learning Experience. Much of the assessment information gathered informs her immediate decisions during the lesson, including adjusting pacing, offering sensory breaks and adapting communication supports in response to children's needs.

Following the Learning Experience

Ms Patel briefly shares key observations with SNAs, parents and relevant professionals (e.g., Speech and Language therapist) to support consistency in communication approaches across the school day and wider contexts. The recorded information helps Ms Patel and the wider team identify communication supports and approaches that are most effective for individual children. In subsequent Learning Experiences, she plans additional opportunities for children to communicate emotions using familiar visual supports, predictable routines and sensory regulation strategies. The information also supports continuity in how adults respond to children's communication and participation across classroom, school and home contexts.

Reflection

This exemplar illustrates how assessment can support meaningful participation and communication in inclusive and responsive ways. It demonstrates how teachers use professional judgement to identify and record significant information that supports children's learning without requiring extensive documentation. Over time, this information contributes to a broader understanding of children's communication, participation and learning progression in the Wellbeing specification across settings and interactions.

8. Whole-school Considerations

Assessment is shaped not only by individual teachers' decisions, but also by shared understandings, routines and systems across the school. Whole-school approaches can support consistency, continuity and professional dialogue, while allowing teachers to respond flexibly to the children and contexts in their classrooms.

Developing a shared approach to assessment

A shared approach begins with a common understanding of how assessment supports children's learning. The eight principles of learning, teaching and assessment of the *Primary School Curriculum* provide a useful reference point for this shared understanding. The following graphic provides examples of how assessment contributes to the realisation of these principles.

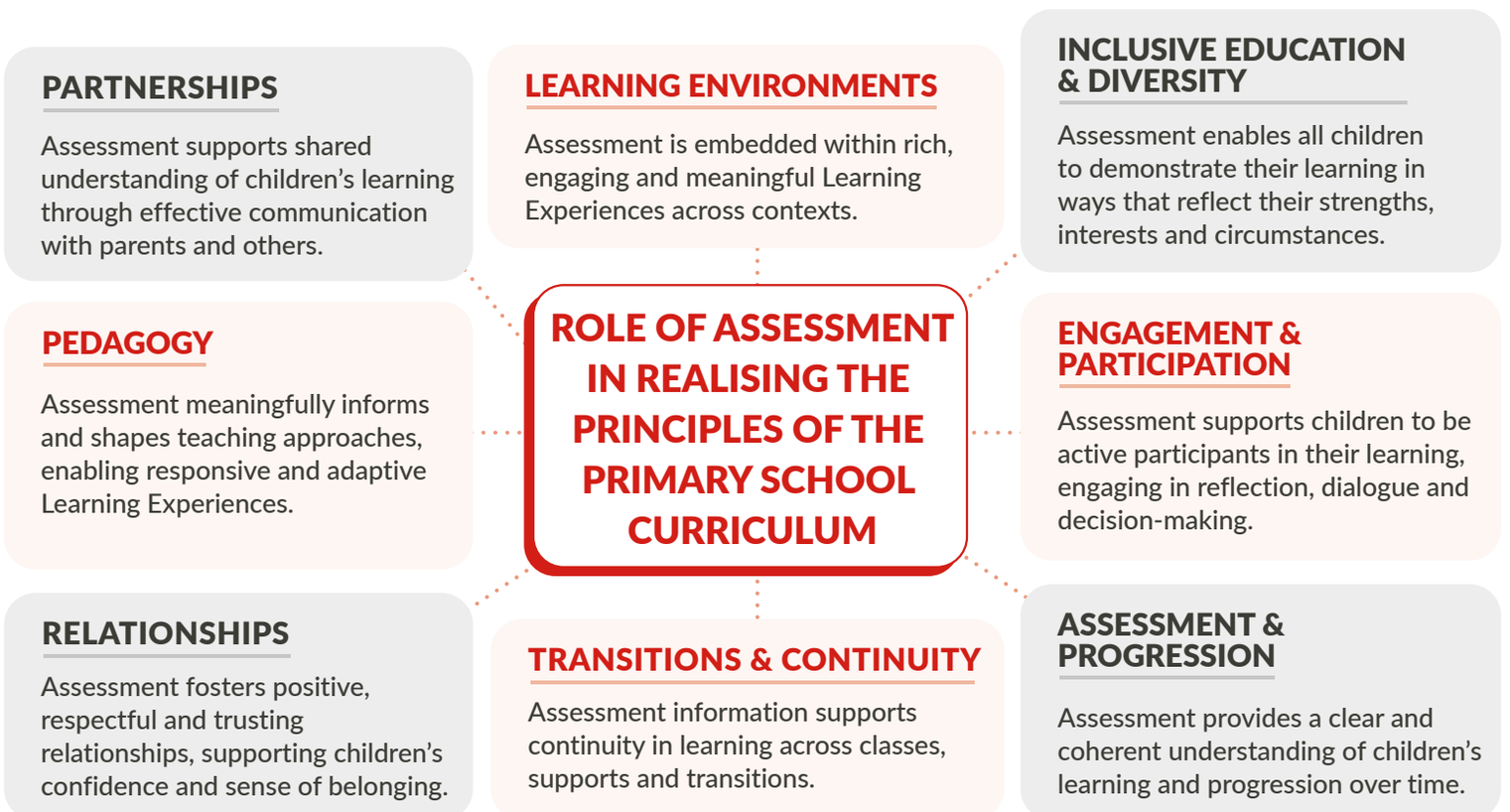


Figure 5: Role of assessment in realising the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum*

Each school develops its own assessment culture through the decisions it makes about what is valued, what information is gathered, how information is interpreted and how it is used to support every child to make progress in their learning and development.

Schools can support a shared approach by agreeing:

- how assessment supports learning, teaching, progression and inclusion
- what information is most useful for understanding children's learning and identifying next steps
- how teachers gather, interpret and use evidence of learning
- how teachers and children communicate about learning, progress and next steps
- where consistency is important across the school and where flexibility is needed
- how time for professional dialogue can be used to review and improve practice.

This does not mean that every teacher must assess in the same way. Rather, it means that teachers have shared expectations, a common language and agreed processes where these are helpful, while retaining professional judgement in their own classrooms.

Spotlight on: Assessment and Artificial Intelligence

Informed, purposeful and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can present opportunities to support teachers' preparation for learning, teaching and assessment. This may include, for example, supporting teachers to clarify the Focus(es) of Learning and success criteria, aiding understanding of unfamiliar topics, generating and refining ideas for Learning Experiences and assessment approaches and suggesting ways to gather or interpret evidence of learning.

As with all digital tools in education, teachers should be aware of the limitations and risks associated with the use of AI in preparation (e.g., misinformation, bias, hallucinations, data privacy, copyright, etc.). Before using tools or programmes which incorporate AI, they must be reviewed for accuracy, alignment with the curriculum, pedagogical relevance, and, most importantly, safety and trustworthiness. This includes ensuring that any AI-generated assessment approaches are valid, inclusive and aligned with the intended Focus(es) of Learning and that they support meaningful evidence of children's learning and progression.

The management of educational data must be secure and protect the privacy of children, teachers and wider members of the school community. Particular caution should be exercised when using AI-enabled technologies, including in relation to the uploading, sharing or processing of educational data, to ensure compliance with data protection, privacy and child safeguarding requirements. Where a decision is made to use a tool incorporating AI, teachers remain in the lead ensuring the tool supports rather than directs their professional decision-making and judgement. This is particularly important where AI is used to generate, analyse or interpret assessment information.

There are several important considerations when exploring the potential use of AI tools to support teacher preparation for learning, teaching and assessment:

- Does the tool adhere to the relevant policies and guidelines of your school and is it GDPR compliant?
- Will the AI tool or programme meaningfully support your preparation, including assessment planning and decision-making?
- Can you guide and shape AI outputs so they support, rather than replace, your professional judgement?
- Are outputs relevant and contextually appropriate to your school setting?
- Do suggested assessment approaches align with the Focus(es) of Learning and support children to demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways?
- Before using the output from the tool, have you checked it for accuracy against other sources?

In all instances, the teacher remains responsible for overseeing the output of any AI tools used and ensuring informed, purposeful and ethical use. This includes ensuring that assessment-related outputs support sound professional judgement and are used to inform, rather than determine, decisions about children's learning, teaching and support.

Further and evolving, information on the use of AI in schools is available from the Department of Education and Youth's Guidance on AI in Schools and through supports provided by Oide and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

Supporting continuity of learning

A whole-school approach to assessment supports continuity in children's learning as they move across learning contexts, through the school and through key transition points. This includes transitions from early childhood settings into primary school, between classes and curriculum stages, across classroom and support settings and onwards to post-primary education.

Practice	Examples of what this might involve
Sharing essential and useful information at transition points	• agreeing what information is essential to record and share, with whom, when and in what circumstances • using structured transition practices, such as professional conversations, end-of-year or handover meetings, sharing learning profiles and support plans, etc. • engaging, where appropriate, with parents, early childhood settings, post-primary schools and other professionals.
Connecting classroom and support settings	• supporting ongoing collaboration between classroom, support teachers and other relevant professionals • ensuring that assessment generated in support settings complements and build on classroom assessment • keeping expectations, approaches and next steps aligned across settings.
Helping children understand their progress	• supporting children to make connections between prior and new learning • enabling children to reflect on their progress and identify next steps • Using approaches such as portfolios, Mo Scéal and/or Education Passport to help children share and reflect on learning across time and at key transition points.

Table 24: Supporting continuity in children's learning

Spotlight on: Leading assessment in schools

School leaders play a central role in shaping a culture where assessment supports every child's learning and development. This involves leading assessment approaches that are guided by the Principles of Learning, Teaching and Assessment and involve high expectations for all children.

In practice, leading assessment involves:

- Promoting a shared assessment culture that values children's learning and progress over time and recognises that success may look different for different children
- Trusting and supporting teachers' professional judgement, recognising their deep knowledge of children, context and learning and avoiding overly prescriptive or compliance-driven approaches
- Creating opportunities for collaborative assessment approaches, where teachers can discuss learning, share insights and reflect together on children's progress and next steps
- Supporting collaboration with parents and external professionals, keeping the child at the centre of discussions
- Using multiple sources of assessment information at school level to reflect on children's learning, identify strengths and priorities and support whole-school improvement over time.

Effective leadership of assessment affirms teachers' professional judgement and promotes inclusion for all children.

Using assessment information to inform support provision at whole-school level

At whole-school level, inclusive assessment recognises and builds on each child's strengths as the foundation for supporting their learning, development and progression. In line with the Continuum of Support, assessment can help schools to:

- plan and implement class programmes and adapt teaching, Learning Experiences and environments through Classroom Support
- plan, implement and review targeted supports through School Support
- inform personalised planning and, where appropriate, external collaboration through School Support Plus
- monitor progress and review whether supports are working
- support continuity where children move between levels of support, classes or settings
- identify patterns that may inform whole-school reflection and improvement.

Working with parents and external professionals

Assessment is strengthened when schools have clear and coordinated ways of working with parents and external professionals. This is particularly important where children require support beyond the classroom.

Parents are important partners in understanding and responding to their child's learning. Their knowledge of the child contributes to the overall assessment picture and can support shared decisions about strengths, needs, next steps and supports.

As well as working with parents, teachers and children, engaging with external professionals (e.g., occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychologists) can be an important part of supporting children's learning, participation and sense of belonging in school.

At times, the purposes of assessment for the classroom teacher and the external professional may be different. For instance, the classroom teacher gathers assessment information to inform teaching and the next steps in learning for the child, while the external professional's assessment focus may be on diagnoses and the provision of additional supports. This creates an opportunity to keep the child at the centre of discussions and ensure his/her strengths are recognised and the expectations for his/her learning remain high.

In practice, keeping the child at the centre of collaboration can involve:

- Sharing relevant classroom assessment information in a concise and precise way
- Ensuring there is clarity on roles and responsibilities
- Keeping learning, development and progression as the focus
- Connecting school-based assessment with information from external professionals
- Using clear, respectful communication that focuses on the child
- Aligning strengths and priorities to reflect the child's learning journey and what matters most for their learning and development.

Sustaining an effective whole-school approach

Sustaining an effective whole-school approach to assessment involves ongoing collaboration, reflection and adaptation over time. High-quality assessment approaches are empowering [E], purposeful [P], inclusive [I] and collaborative [C] and it is important that these characteristics underpin assessment across the school.

The following table is intended to support schools in this process by focusing attention on assessment practices and by providing prompts to support ongoing professional dialogue, shared understanding and coherent approaches to assessment across the school. It may be useful for schools to focus solely on selected aspects of practice and/or curriculum areas, depending on their context and priorities.

	In reflecting on this area:
A shared understanding of assessment supports learning and progression across the school	• How clearly can we articulate the purpose of assessment in our school and how consistently is this reflected in practice? [P, C] • What shared understanding do we have of progression across the curriculum and how is this visible across the school? [P, C] • How consistent are assessment expectations and approaches across classes and support settings? What evidence tells us this? [P, I, C]
Assessment informs teaching and supports progression in learning	• In what ways is assessment embedded in day-to-day learning and teaching? [P] • How do teachers use evidence of learning to adapt teaching, provide feedback and identify meaningful next steps? [E, P] • How well do our approaches align with the Purposes of Assessment? What changes may be needed? [I, P]
Children actively engage in understanding and progressing their learning	• What opportunities are provided to support children to understand what they are learning, why they are learning it and what success looks like? [E, P] • What regular opportunities do they have to meaningfully reflect on and share their learning? [E, P] • In what ways do our assessment approaches strengthen children's confidence, agency and ownership as learners? [E]
Assessment supports inclusion and progression for all children	• How effectively do our assessment approaches support all children to access, participate in and demonstrate learning in meaningfully ways? [P, I] • How is assessment information used to plan and review support provision for children? [P, I, C] • How do we ensure continuity and shared understanding of children's learning when they move between teachers, classes or support settings? [I, C]
Teachers engage in collaborative dialogue to support assessment approaches and decision-making	• How do we develop shared understandings of learning expectations and progression across the curriculum? [P, C] • In what ways do we collaboratively interpret and discuss evidence of children's learning? [P, C] • How does professional dialogue about assessment influence our practice and improve outcomes for children? [P, C]
Assessment information supports communication and partnership	• How do we work in partnership with children and parents to develop a shared understanding of learning, progress and next steps? [E, C] • How effectively is assessment information communicated so that it is meaningful and accessible to children, parents and relevant professionals? [P, I, C] • How does communication between children, teachers, parents and other professionals support collaborative decision-making about learning? [I, C]

	In reflecting on this area:
Teachers and school leaders have the collective capacity to interpret and use assessment information collaboratively to support children's learning and wellbeing	• What range of assessment information do we draw on to better understand and make decisions about children's learning? [P, I, C] • How confident are staff in interpreting assessment information, identifying when additional guidance or support is needed and knowing who to collaborate with? [C] • What structures, routines and opportunities will help us establish and sustain effective collaborative assessment in our school? [C]
Assessment informs school planning and improvement	• How do we use assessment information to identify our strengths and areas for improvement, learning and support provision across the school? [P, C] • How does assessment information inform school improvement priorities and actions? [I, P] • How do we monitor and evaluate the impact of changes in our assessment approaches over time? [P, C]

Table 25: Sustaining an effective whole-school approach

Spotlight on: Capturing and recording assessment information

Not all assessment information, observation or interaction needs to be formally recorded. Many assessment interactions are immediate and responsive in nature, generating and capturing assessment information within artefacts and supporting learning and teaching in the moment, without requiring formal recording.

Recording of assessment information should be selective, purposeful and proportionate, focusing on information that meaningfully supports progression, continuity, communication or decision-making. It should not detract from meaningful engagement with children, responsive teaching and professional decision-making. Instead, it should contribute to informing:

- next steps in learning and teaching
- continuity across classes, teachers and settings
- preparation for Learning Experiences and supports
- a holistic understanding of the child's strengths, needs, interests and progression.

As highlighted in the *Preparation for Learning, Teaching and Assessment – Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools (2026)*, recorded documentation should be "useful, purposeful and practical".

Professional judgement is central in determining what assessment information should be recorded. At school level, professional conversations can support the development of sustainable approaches to recorded assessment information, ensuring that recording practices are purposeful and avoiding unnecessary duplication or recording for compliance purposes.

Recorded assessment information that is particularly useful in supporting continuity, communication and decision-making often includes quantitative information such as literacy/numeracy levels, standardised test scores, pre- and post-intervention results and diagnostic information; as well as qualitative insights into children's strengths, engagement, wellbeing, progress and the supports or pedagogical and assessment approaches that best support their learning.

9. Outline of the Primary Assessment Toolkit

The Primary Assessment Toolkit aims to support teachers in using assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching, enhancing both teacher understanding and children's Learning Experiences.

Support materials for teachers aim to build assessment literacy and support practice. These materials include guidance on practical ways to elicit evidence of children's learning and approaches to providing meaningful feedback and involving children in the assessment process.

The toolkit will include supports for making judgements about children's learning, with annotated examples and guidance to help teachers use evidence confidently and appropriately. In addition, supports for responding to learning will be included, illustrating how assessment information can be used to adapt learning and teaching and support progression.

Recognising the diverse ways in which children learn and develop, the toolkit will provide guidance on inclusive and responsive assessment approaches, as well as approaches to recording and communicating assessment information.

Examples or vignettes will illustrate how teachers gather evidence in everyday classroom contexts, interpret that evidence and use it to inform next steps in learning and teaching. These examples will offer insights into teacher decision-making and the use of professional judgement.

The contents and components of the online toolkit will evolve over time and be developed in collaboration with teachers, informed by research and responsive to the diverse needs of children and school communities.

Figure 6: Primary Assessment Toolkit

10. Glossary

Agency	Agency is the capacity to act independently and to make choices about teaching and learning.
Assessment Events	Assessment events are distinct, visible and recorded events. Children are usually aware they are being assessed.
Assessment information	Assessment information includes the wide range of information that teachers and children gather, notice, document and reflect on as learning unfolds.
Assessment methods	Assessment methods offer different ways of noticing and gathering assessment information and inform the interpretation and use of this information.
Classroom Support	Classroom Support refers to universal, preventative and proactive interventions for all children and especially for those with emerging needs, which is coordinated by the class teacher and carried out within the classroom.
Communication	The total communication approach is a flexible, inclusive strategy that uses all available methods of communication to help individuals express themselves effectively.
Continuum of Support	The Continuum of Support is a framework that identifies children's strengths and needs, monitors how they respond to intervention, recognises that support requirements change over time, ensures that help is allocated flexibly and progressively from class-based to more individualised interventions, through an ongoing process of assess, plan and review.
Criterion-referenced assessment	Criterion-referenced assessments focus on how children's learning aligns with clear expectations or criteria.
Diagnostic assessment	Diagnostic assessment refers to a form of assessment used to identify learners' existing knowledge, skills, strengths, needs or misconceptions before or during learning. Diagnostic assessments help teachers plan appropriate teaching approaches and supports by providing information about where learners are in their learning progression.
Dialogue	Dialogue is understood as a collaborative and respectful process of communication that can take many forms, including spoken, written, visual, digital and non-verbal expression. In terms of assessment, inclusive dialogue recognises that individuals communicate and participate in different ways and it values all forms of expression equally. It ensures that every child has meaningful opportunities to contribute, be understood and influence shared understanding. Inclusive dialogue is characterised by active listening, openness, empathy and a commitment to participation, belonging and mutual learning.
Evidence of learning	Evidence of learning refers to the assessment information that teachers identify as particularly meaningful and relevant for answering a question, making a judgement or informing next steps.
Focus(es) of Learning	The Focus(es) of Learning includes the knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and/or values that children will learn or develop next. In identifying the Focus(es) of Learning, a single Learning Outcome or aspects of more than one Learning Outcome may be selected from within and across specifications, facilitating integration where meaningful and appropriate.
Intuitive assessment	Intuitive assessment occurs naturally and on an ongoing basis during Learning Experiences.
Learning Experience	These experiences encompass what the children will do, will engage in, will experience, will create, etc., as they work towards the Focus(es) of Learning.
Norm-referenced assessment	Norm-referenced assessments compare a child's performance with that of a representative group of children of a similar age or class level. They provide information about a child's relative performance and may help identify patterns in attainment over time.
Planned interactions	Planned interactions are more explicit than intuitive assessments and may be recorded. Children may or may not be aware they are being assessed.

Progression	Progression describes how children's learning deepens, broadens and becomes more sophisticated over time. It is developmental and non-linear, with children learning at different rates and in different ways.
Reflection (for children)	Children's reflection may be observed, interpreted, co-constructed with adults. Where appropriate, supported reflection can involve interpreting children's verbal and non-verbal responses.
School Support	School Support refers to providing targeted teaching and learning interventions for small groups or individual pupils with specific educational needs. This level of support is planned for and delivered collaboratively by the class teacher and SET.
School Support Plus	School Support Plus refers to the provision of highly individualised, intensive and targeted teaching and learning interventions for children whose special educational needs are longterm and significantly affect their learning and participation in school. This level of support involves the special education teacher and, where appropriate, input from relevant external professionals or services.
Success criteria	Success criteria are created by the teacher and/or the child and describe what success looks like in a particular Learning Experience. They assist the teacher and child in reflecting on learning.

ASSESSMENT
at a glance

PURPOSES
Assessment is used to...

Support learning and teaching

Understand and empower children as learners

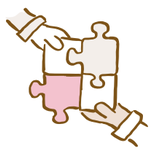
Facilitate the sharing of information

CHARACTERISTICS
HIGH-QUALITY ASSESSMENT IS...

Empowering

Purposeful

Inclusive



Collaborative

PROCESSES
Assessment happens as Teachers and Children...

CONTINUUM of ASSESSMENT
Assessment takes place through...

- INTUITIVE ASSESSMENT
- PLANNED INTERACTIONS
- ASSESSMENT EVENTS

METHODS
Assessment methods used include...

Conferencing

Feedback

Observation

Peer- and self-assessment

Portfolios

Project-based learning

Questioning

Rubrics, checklists, shared success criteria

Standardised testing

Teacher-designed tasks and tests

NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment