

Guidance for Observation and Target Setting in Understanding the World (EYFS)

Ofsted Definition of Teaching in the Early Years:

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

6 Key Questions to ask when observing Understanding the World:

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
1	How does the teacher encourage children to share and value experiences of their own home and community?	For example, how does the teacher: • encourage children to talk about their home and community life? • encourage positive relationships with community visitors (e.g. fire fighters, delivery personnel), and share stories about people from the past?
2	How does the teacher help children explore and value diversity and culture?	For example, how does the teacher: • provide ways of preserving memories of special events (books, photos, recordings)? • invite families to share photographs, objects and experiences from their own or other cultures? • help children and parents see similarities between cultures and beliefs, celebrating a range of practices and special events? • visit different parts of the local community and provide role-play resources and stories reflecting diversity?
3	How does the teacher support children to explore the local area and natural environment, and to develop a sense of connection to and care for the world around them?	For example, how does the teacher: • use the local area for exploring the built and natural environment? • provide opportunities to observe closely and explore different habitats?

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
		• teach skills and knowledge through practical activities, e.g. melting chocolate, cooking, observing ice? • help children notice and respond to environmental chance, e.g. seasons, weather, growing things? • involve children in caring for shared environments and living things, e.g. growing food, minibeast hotels, recycling? • embed sustainability concepts (reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle) into everyday practice rather than as a standalone topic?
4	How does the teacher support children to investigate change and think scientifically?	For example, how does the teacher: • examine change over time, including change that can and cannot be reversed (e.g. growing plants, melting ice)? • pose carefully framed open-ended questions and prompts ("How can we...?", "What would happen if...?", "I wonder...")? • give opportunities to design and care for practical environments?
5	How does the teacher support children's curiosity about cause and effect, and how things (including technology) work, and ensure any digital technology used is purposeful and child-led?	For example, how does the teacher: • support children to be curious about cause and effect, and to speculate on why things happen or how things work? • support children to coordinate actions to use technology, e.g. making a call or a video recording, or clicking icons in a program? • choose technology intentionally, asking "what does this make possible for the child?" rather than defaulting to a screen? • ensure the child – not the device – drives the activity, and avoid technology replacing adult interaction (e.g. singing with children rather than playing a video)?
6	How does the teacher support children's understanding of the past and present?	For example, how does the teacher: • encourage children to talk about past and present events in their own lives and the lives of family members?

	Question (no more than 6)	Additional Information
		• use photographs, artefacts, non-fiction books and stories to help children compare past and present? • introduce children, in age-appropriate ways, to significant people, events and places from the past? • model and encourage vocabulary related to time and sequence (e.g. before, after, then, now, a long time ago)?

Potential **Understanding the World** Specific Targets on Lesson Analysis Forms.

Lesson design and delivery, including sequencing and choice of teaching methods Next Steps:
Plan opportunities for children to share and compare experiences of their own home, community and culture, being sensitive to differing family circumstances.
Plan opportunities for children to talk about past and present events in their own lives and to compare these using photographs, artefacts and stories.
Plan visits, walks or visitors that connect children with the local community and natural environment.
Include practical, hands-on activities that let children investigate change and cause and effect (e.g. cooking, melting, growing plants).
Provide a range of everyday and programmable technology for children to explore purposefully within play.
Plan open-ended questions ("What would happen if...?", "How can we...?") to prompt children's thinking during investigations.
Plan how technology use in your session is purposeful and child-led, considering what the digital experience adds or replaces.
Plan opportunities for children to notice, respond to, and care for their local environment (e.g. seasonal change, growing things, minibeast habitats).

Adapting planning and teaching to ensure that individual needs are met Next Steps:
Plan how you will make discussions about people, communities and culture sensitive and accessible for all children's family circumstances.
Consider additional support (e.g. simplified vocabulary, visual resources) for children exploring scientific concepts or technology for the first time.

Identify how you will extend enquiry-based learning for children who show strong curiosity or understanding of the natural world.

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

Note children's questions and vocabulary when talking about people, communities, the environment or technology, comparing to Development Matters expectations.

Observe how children use tools or technology purposefully, and identify their next steps in coordinating actions.

Assess children's growing understanding of similarities and differences between their own and others' lives, communities and environments.

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

Develop secure knowledge of the Understanding the World strands (People, Culture and Communities; The Natural World) and how they interlink.

Extend your own subject knowledge of simple scientific concepts (e.g. states of matter, habitats) that arise during children's play and investigations.

Reflect on how your resources and displays authentically represent diversity, avoiding stereotypes or outdated representations.

Develop your understanding of digital pedagogy – how to evaluate the quality of digital tools and judge when technology adds value versus when it replaces richer hands-on learning.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Birth-to-5-Matters-Doc-LINKS.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

- Whitebread, D. & Coltman, P. (2015), *Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*. Routledge
- Grenier, J., O'Sullivan, J., Pemberton, L., & Bradbury, A. (2025), 'Understanding the World', in Grenier, J. and Vollans, C., *Putting the EYFS Curriculum into Practice*, Sage, pp. 103-126.