

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking
Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through play (pp.56-57 and 103-106), Learning and developing through interactions (p.28, 30, 42)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2: *Environments*, C2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7
Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

Using the Self-evaluation Tool

This **Self-evaluation Tool** will help you to reflect on the learning environment, indoor and outdoor, that you provide as an individual practitioner or as a team.

1. This tool is divided into **5 elements**.

- Indoor physical layout
- Indoor displays
- Indoor resources
- Outdoor physical layout
- Outdoor resources

2. Each element has a **series of statements**. For each statement, choose which of the following best reflects your current practice.

No evidence	This element is not present.
Some evidence	This element is evident to a small extent.
Significant evidence	This element is largely present but there are areas where work is needed.
Comprehensive evidence	This statement is fully evident.

If you would like to make notes or record examples from your practice about any of the statements, a box is provided for this.

Using the Self-evaluation Tool

3. After each element you will find **prompts for reflection**.

As you consider these, think about your practice—what you do and how you do it. This will support you to identify what is working well and the challenges within each element.

4. Make a note of changes you want to make.

5. After using the Self-evaluation Tool, you may find it useful to look at the sections, *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Resources for Sharing* at aistearsiolta.ie.

6. The Action Planning Template in the section, *Action Planning Tools* can help you plan specific changes you decide to make.

Before working with this pillar, we recommend you work on *Curriculum Foundations*.

Practitioners' names

Date

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

The learning environment is a place where children need to feel welcome and secure. This environment needs both structure and flexibility, and should be beautiful and interesting with lots of natural and open-ended materials. Spaces are provided for children to play alone and with small groups of friends. Children can easily see what resources are available for their play. The environment is interesting for children and provides opportunities for them to move, to explore and think, to be creative and to progress in their learning.

Our indoor learning environment		No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
1	is divided into play areas including pretend, construction, messy, quiet, library, mark-making/writing. These are labelled using pictures and words.					
2	has areas with similar activities beside each other, for example, the messy play area near the sink and the reading area in a quiet space.					
3	incorporates young children's current interests .					
4	has enough space to enable young children to move around comfortably and move materials, for example, moving trucks from the pretend area to the sand area.					
5	has a room layout that enables young children to play alone, with an adult, or in pairs or small groups.					

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

Our indoor learning environment		No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
6	has cosy spaces with comfortable seating where young children can relax on their own or with a key person, for example, to read stories or provide comfort.					
7	has mirrors at child height and accessible handheld mirrors.					
8	has toys, equipment and materials (natural where possible) accessible to all young children including those with disabilities.					
9	has walls painted in a neutral colour with no murals or strong colours.					
10	is well-lit with as much natural light as possible and has a variety of indoor lighting – dimmers, lamps and fairy lights.					
11	has good ventilation , for example, windows that can open and fans or air conditioning for hot weather.					

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

Our indoor learning environment	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
12 limits background noise .					
13 has floor coverings in a variety of surfaces such as cosy and smooth.					
14 has a child-level sink .					
15 has easy access to the outdoors so that children can choose to be inside or outside.					
16 has soft furnishings like rugs, cushions and table cloths and contains plants and fresh flowers.					
17 has storage space with a name and photo for each young child's belongings.					

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing a quality indoor physical layout for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing this indoor physical layout for young children.
- What **aspects** of this work would you like to prioritise and focus on in the coming weeks?

You can use the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Action Planning Tools* in the Practice Guide to help you plan this work.

Practitioners' names

Date

DD/MM/YY

Element 2: Indoor displays

Displays reflect all young children's backgrounds, communities, cultures and languages including Irish, making a connection between home and the setting. Displays include photos from home and of children's experiences in the setting, showing that these experiences are valued and enabling young children to revisit them. Wall displays, group and individual learning journals, and learning stories help to create conversations and share information between children, practitioners and parents.

Our indoor displays include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
1 photos of young children's families and others who have special significance for them, including pets, displayed low on a wall or in albums.					
2 paintings, drawings and photos of young children at play displayed where they can see them. These are dated, named and updated regularly.					
3 an information area for parents.					
4 documentation noticeboards or display areas which show: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children's art, constructions, photos and learning experiences • young children's backgrounds, cultures and languages • the local community. 					
5 labelled materials, storage and facilities such as toilets, using pictures and words.					

Practitioners' names

Date

Element 3: Indoor resources

Exploring and playing with a variety of materials and resources helps young children to make choices about what interests them. These opportunities help them to develop their competence and confidence as learners. Resources should be made from natural materials where possible, limiting the use of plastic. Open-ended materials which can be used in different ways and for different purposes encourage young children to be creative and imaginative, and to explore and think.

Our indoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
1 a variety of equipment, toys and other items using as much natural and open-ended material as possible to support different types of play – creative, language, physical and pretend.					
2 equipment and materials that reflect diversity including ability, gender, ethnicity and family structure.					
3 equipment to promote the Irish language, culture and heritage , for example, CDs and traditional musical instruments.					
4 equipment and materials that support young children with special educational needs including physical, sensory and learning needs.					
5 real items such as pots, pans, cups, plates, teapots, cutlery and utensils, dust-pans and brushes, telephones, steering wheels, hard-hats and props such as bags, shawls and shoes for young children to use.					

Element 3: Indoor resources

Our indoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
6 a range of play props for different topics, for example, the mart, the hairdresser, the travel agent, the café, the North Pole, the hospital and the supermarket.					
7 labelled storage for equipment and resources in a variety of textures , for example, baskets, tins and wooden boxes so that children can independently find, use and return them.					
8 a variety of literacy items such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper, cardboard, pencils, chalk, crayons, paint, notebooks, magazines, newspapers, leaflets • wooden, magnetic and sandpaper letters • a large selection of suitable books for young children, including nursery rhyme, pop-up, lift-the-flap and factual books related to children’s interests and current topics • children’s own created story books • puppets, story sacks and other props to bring stories to life. 					
9 a variety of numeracy items such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weighing scales, measuring tapes, rulers, calculators, jugs, clocks • wooden, magnetic and sandpaper numbers • blocks of different sizes and a variety of boxes • items to count, sort, pair, stack, order in a variety of colours, shapes, sizes and textures • stories with maths related ideas. 					
10 instruments, CDs, wind-chimes and shakers for exploring sound and music .					

Element 3: Indoor resources

Our indoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
11 natural materials such as sand, water, paint, play-dough and gloop with accessories such as jugs, bowls and measuring spoons.					
12 open-ended materials such as tubes, CDs, fabrics, switches, Velcro, padlocks, stones, corks and shells in a variety of textures such as rough, smooth, soft and hard.					
13 a variety of materials to make indoor dens and hide-outs such as fabric, sticks, pegs and cardboard boxes.					
14 opportunities for young children to use technology including digital cameras and computers.					
15 a wide selection of materials and experiences to ensure challenge and progression in learning.					
16 materials and equipment that are well-maintained and safe .					

Practitioners' names

Date

Element 4: Outdoor physical layout

Being outside gives young children opportunities to connect with nature and to experience the seasons. The outdoors can enable young children to build on a big scale, to take part in and enjoy big physical movements like running and climbing, to be messier and noisier while also providing spaces to be quiet, to look at books and to just observe what is going on around them. While it is helpful to have some interest areas, it is also important that young children can create their own play spaces and invent their own play.

Our outdoor learning environment		No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
1	is used by young children and practitioners daily .					
2	enables young children to play alone, in pairs and in small groups or with practitioners.					
3	has easy access from the indoor playroom and to toilets.					
4	has a tap or other source of water nearby.					

Element 4: Outdoor physical layout

Our outdoor learning environment		No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
5	has adequate storage for outside resources.					
6	ensures equipment, toys and resources are accessible so children can independently find, use and return them.					
7	provides protection from the weather such as an awning or cover to provide shade in summer and shelter in winter.					
8	is divided into interest areas , for example, messy area, area for wheeled toys, for climbing, building, planting, digging, with places to hide, to be quiet, to paint, to pretend and facilitates the movement of materials from one area to another.					
9	provides a variety of surfaces including grass and has an open space for young children to run.					

Element 4: Outdoor physical layout

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing a quality outdoor physical layout for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing this outdoor physical layout for young children.
- What **aspects** of this work would you like to prioritise and focus on in the coming weeks?

You can use the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Action Planning Tools* in the Practice Guide to help you plan this work.

Practitioners' names

Date

Element 5: Outdoor resources

Nature is a great resource outdoors and it changes every day. Young children need opportunities to engage with nature – to have first-hand experience of sun, wind and rain, and playing with grass and soil. At the same time, materials used indoors can also be used outdoors. These resources should provide challenge for young children and support their developing skills, dispositions, values and attitudes, and knowledge and understanding.

Our outdoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
1 suitable outdoor clothes for young children and practitioners such as wellies, waterproof coats, pull-ups, hats, scarves, gloves and sun hats with suitable storage for these.					
2 a variety and sufficient amount of equipment, materials and toys (natural materials predominantly and limiting the use of plastic) to support different types of play such as pretend, creative, language and physical.					
3 equipment and materials that reflect diversity including ability, gender, ethnic diversity and family structure.					
4 equipment and materials that support young children with special educational needs including physical, sensory and learning needs.					
5 tricycles for pedalling and bicycles without pedals for balance.					

Element 5: Outdoor resources

Our outdoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
6 a variety of materials to make dens such as fabric, sticks, pegs and cardboard boxes.					
7 a variety of open-ended natural materials such as water, paint, blocks, stones as well as sand and soil for digging and planting.					
8 wind-chimes, shakers and other materials to explore sound and music .					
9 a texture wall or herb garden or space where young children can use their senses to explore .					
10 a variety of literacy items such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper, pencils, chalk, blackboards, cardboard, paint, crayons • wooden, magnetic and sandpaper letters • magazines, picture books, books about trees, plants, growing vegetables, birds and animals • props to bring stories to life. 					
11 a variety of numeracy items such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • piping, jugs, measuring tapes, rulers, clocks • wooden, magnetic and sandpaper numbers • different sized blocks and a variety of boxes • items to sort, count, pair, stack and order in different colours, shapes, sizes and textures. 					

Element 5: Outdoor resources

Our outdoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
12 safety mirrors at the level of young children.					
13 a space where adults and young children can sit comfortably to read a book or observe.					
14 equipment and materials that provide challenge and progression in learning.					
15 materials and equipment that are well-maintained and safe .					

Element 5: Outdoor resources

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing quality outdoor resources for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing quality outdoor resources for young children.
- What **aspects** of this work would you like to prioritise and focus on in the coming weeks?

You can use the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Action Planning Tools* in the Practice Guide to help you plan this work.