

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 Digest 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 element 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

A nurturing yet challenging and stimulating environment helps young children to grow and develop. This environment needs structure and flexibility, and should be beautiful and interesting with lots of natural and open-ended materials. Spaces are provided for young children to play alone and with small groups of friends. There are opportunities for them to express themselves, 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 labelled play areas such as building area, messy play area, cosy area, construction area, pretend play area.					
2	has areas with similar activities beside each other, for example, the messy play area near the sink.					
3	incorporates babies' and toddlers' 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	the room layout 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 where young children can relax on their own or with a key person with comfortable seating, for example, to bottle feed, read stories or provide comfort.					
7 has a hidey-hole or space where toddlers think they can't be seen.					
8 has mirrors at child height and accessible handheld mirrors.					
9 has toys, equipment and materials (natural where possible) accessible to all young children including those with disabilities.					
10 has safe spaces for babies to roll, crawl and walk with non-slip mats.					
11 has rails, grab-bars and sturdy furniture which babies can safely pull up on.					

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

Our indoor learning environment	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
12 has slides, tunnels, boxes, steps and ramps for climbing up, through, over and into.					
13 has walls painted in a neutral colour with no murals or strong colours.					
14 is well-lit with as much natural light as possible and has a variety of indoor lighting – dimmers, lamps and fairy lights.					
15 has good ventilation , for example, windows that can open and fans or air conditioning for hot weather.					
16 limits background noise .					
17 has floor coverings in a variety of surfaces such as cosy and smooth.					

Element 1: Indoor physical layout

Our indoor learning environment		No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
18	has soft furnishings like rugs, cushions and table cloths and contains plants and fresh flowers.					
19	has sleep rooms with observation panels, monitors, soft lighting and storage for mats and bedding.					
20	has appropriately equipped nappy-changing areas .					
21	has low level windows so young children can look out.					
22	has storage space with a name and photo for each baby's and toddler'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

Element 2: Indoor displays

Displays reflect all babies' and toddlers' 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 babies' and toddlers' families and others who have special significance for them, and pets displayed low on a wall, on 'cubes' 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"> • learning experiences • babies' and toddlers' backgrounds, cultures and languages • the local community 					
5 labelled materials, storage and facilities such as toilets, using pictures and words.					

Element 2: Indoor displays

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing quality indoor displays for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing quality indoor displays 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 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. These 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 explore and to 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 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 life items such as cups, plates, teapots, spoons, saucepans, 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 labelled storage for equipment and resources in a variety of textures , for example, baskets, tins for young children to access.					
7 treasure baskets with items in a variety of textures such as toothbrushes, bath ducks, a soft ball, hair comb, pine cones, pastry brush.					
8 a variety of paper, card, crayons, chalk, chalk boards, paints, easels, chubby pencils, paper, magazines and puppets to support babies' and toddlers' emerging literacy .					
9 a variety of clocks, wooden, magnetic and sandpaper numbers, blocks of different sizes, soft balls and boxes to stack, sort, empty and refill to support babies' and toddlers' emerging numeracy .					
10 a large selection of suitable books for young children, including nursery rhyme, pop-up, lift the flap, sturdy books that are accessible on low shelves, in baskets or boxes.					
11 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
<p>12 stable and slow-moving trolleys and push-along cars to support babies as they learn to walk.</p>					
<p>13 push-and-pull wheeled toys such as handheld cars and tractors, trailers and trucks for transporting objects.</p>					
<p>14 natural materials such as sand, water, paint, play-dough and gloop with accessories such as jugs, bowls, measuring spoons.</p>					
<p>15 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.</p>					
<p>16 materials and equipment that are well maintained and safe.</p>					

Element 3: Indoor resources

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to providing quality indoor resources for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in providing quality indoor 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.

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 babies and toddlers and practitioners daily .					
2	enables toddlers to play alone, in pairs and in small groups or with practitioners.					
3	has easy access from the indoor playroom as well as from the nappy changing areas and 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
<p>5 has adequate storage for outside resources.</p>					
<p>6 provides protection from the weather such as an awning or cover to provide shade in summer and shelter in winter.</p>					
<p>7 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.</p>					
<p>8 has a safe space where babies can sit on rugs or mats and watch other children.</p>					
<p>9 provides a variety of surfaces, including grass and has an open space for toddlers to run.</p>					

Element 4: Outdoor physical layout

Prompts for Reflection

- Think about what is **working well** in relation to the outdoor physical layout for young children.
- Think about the **challenges** you have experienced in developing outdoor physical layouts 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 babies, toddlers and practitioners, such as wellies, waterproof coats, pull-ups, hats, scarves, gloves, 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	tunnels and boxes so toddlers can climb and crawl in and out, as well as 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
<p>6 a variety of open-ended natural materials such as water, paint, blocks, stones as well as sand and soil for digging and planting.</p>					
<p>7 wind-chimes, shakers and other materials to explore sound and music.</p>					
<p>8 a texture wall or herb garden or space where young children can use their senses to explore.</p>					
<p>9 materials and items such as jugs, buckets, rulers, scales and mark-making equipment and books to support emerging numeracy and literacy skills.</p>					
<p>10 safety mirrors at the level of young children.</p>					
<p>11 a space where adults and young children can sit comfortably to read a book or observe.</p>					

Element 5: Outdoor resources

Our outdoor resources include	No evidence	Some evidence	Significant evidence	Comprehensive evidence	Notes / Examples
<p>12 materials and equipment that are well-maintained and safe.</p>					

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.