



# OPAL

Observation of Play and Learning

Opal: A precious stone whose colour changes depending on your viewpoint.  
A gem that comes in many shimmering colours.



## Our Approach to Assessment

As a Federation of Nursery schools, we feel a responsibility to develop a model of *effective, meaningful and principled* assessment of young children's learning.

By **effective**, we mean a method of assessment that ensures that all children are supported in reaching significant milestones.

By **meaningful**, we mean that the observations made inform our everyday practice and curriculum. By gaining an insight into children's thinking, feeling and needs we can plan our environment and actions to provide future possibilities for learning.

By **principled**, we mean that our focus is on **observing to understand** children. We will not test children or seek unnecessary knowledge. Children are recognised as individuals, not as a percentage in a pie chart.

We will not spend unnecessary amounts of time writing observations or gathering evidence of children's learning. We believe that if we are **capturing** the moment, we cannot be **part** of the moment. Instead we have structures in place that enable us to regularly discuss each child as a team.

## Typical Development at 6 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Smiles back at an adult or cries if they hear another child cry.
- Takes everything to mouth.
- Watches faces intently.

### Communication and Language

- Laughs and squeals out loud when playing.
- Responds to interactions with familiar adults.
- Moves head to find familiar sounds.

### Physical Development

- When offered a toy, will reach for it.
- Kicks strongly with alternate legs.
- Sits well with support, holding head up.

## Typical Development at 12 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Likes to be in sight and hearing of a familiar adult.
- Enjoys peek-a-boo games.
- Responds to facial expressions and tone of voice.

### Communication and Language

- Turns to own name.
- Understands simple instructions (clap hands).
- Babbles and makes different noises.

### Physical Development

- Can sit without support.
- Pulls up to standing position.
- Can move from lying down to sitting.
- Drinks from a cup with a lid and feeds themselves finger foods.

## Typical Development at 18 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Seeks physical contact from others.
- Watches what friends are doing.
- Can use pointing to let an adult know what they want.

### Communication and Language

- Jabbers to themselves when playing.
- Points to own nose, hair, feet etc.
- Starting to use single words.

### Physical Development

- Walks independently.
- Will squat to pick up objects.
- Walks upstairs with a helping hand.

## Typical Development at 24 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Enjoys simple make-believe play e.g. having a cup of tea.
- Likes to do things for themselves, without help.
- Displays a range of big emotions, eg. May jump up and down when excited.

### Communication and Language

- Puts two or more words together.
- Repeats words and finds objects when asked e.g. ball, shoes.
- Responds to familiar music, songs or rhymes.

### Physical Development

- Climbs over obstacles.
- Uses a spoon or fork to feed themselves.
- Climbs stairs independently.

## Typical Development at 30 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Watches what friends are doing and joins in with play.
- Likes to help you when you are busy, e.g. putting shopping away.
- Begins to assert independence and challenge boundaries.

### Communication and Language

- Is interested in books and stories.
- Can stop what they are doing and can listen to you.
- Uses lots of new words.
- Beginning to use words like, me, I and you.

### Physical Development

- Can run around, change direction and slow down so they don't bump into things.
- Can make lines and marks.
- Builds a tower.

## Typical Development at 36 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Shows an interest in others and makes new relationships.
- Explores new environments.

### Communication and Language

- Responds to questions and instructions.
- Asks for help if they need it.
- Speaks in simple sentences.

### Physical Development

- Uses the toilet with some support.
- Moves around their environment with awareness and control.
- Manages a range of equipment purposefully e.g. can use a spade to fill a bucket.

### Literacy

- Enjoys sharing books with adults.
- Uses simple marks including lines, curves and circular movements.

### Maths

- Shows an awareness of number.
- Uses mathematical language in their play e.g. big, small, heavy, light

## Typical Development at 42 Months

### Personal and Social and Emotional Development

- Shows awareness of the feelings of others.
- Knows what they want to play with and where to find it.
- Plays with others.

### Communication and Language

- Sings songs and rhymes.
- Talks with other children.
- Listens and responds to things said by others.
- Able to follow an instruction with two parts e.g. Get your coat and open the door.

### Physical Development

- Uses the toilet independently.
- Climbs, runs and jumps with confidence.
- Uses toys and tools safely.

### Literacy

- Enjoys listening to stories and making up play scenarios.
- Makes many different marks, including closed shapes, e.g. circles.

### Maths

- Knows how to solve everyday problems in their play e.g. how to get water from one place to another.
- Recognises some numbers and shows an interest in counting.

## Typical Development at 48 Months

### Personal and Social and Emotional Development

- Can play with others, sharing what they are using with help.
- Plays imaginatively with other children.
- Confident to have a go and try new things.

### Communication and Language

- Talks about what they are doing and things they remember.
- Starts conversations with familiar people and asks questions.
- Listens when they are in a group with other children.

### Physical Development

- Can dress themselves with some support.
- Gives new challenges a go and is aware of their own safety.
- Uses resources with some control, e.g. can pour from a jug into a cup.

### Literacy

- Looks at books and has some favourites.
- Makes marks to represent their name and talks about their drawings.
- Knows the difference between pictures and words.

### Maths

- Beginning to count objects in their play.
- Understands how different shapes fit together e.g. in their art work or block play.
- Will notice who has more or less e.g. who has more trains or pieces of fruit.

## Typical Development at 54 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Stays at activities that they really like without being distracted by other things or people.
- Understands and follows some rules.
- Is able to make friends.

### Communication and Language

- Listens attentively in a range of situations.
- Asks and answers questions to find out more.
- Talks in clear sentences about people they know, what they see and how they are feeling.

### Physical Development

- Uses a variety of tools with accuracy, e.g. pencils, paint brushes and scissors.
- Independently uses the toilet and keeps themselves clean and dry.
- Can move around spaces with control and co-ordination.

### Literacy

- Begins to recognise familiar letters or words e.g. letters in their name, familiar names and shop signs. and sometimes writes them.
- Can form shapes that are starting to look like letters.
- Will talk about stories as they are read to them.

### Maths

- Counts to find out how many things they have.
- Recognises numbers in their environment.
- Knows the names of some shapes.
- Notices and compares size, weight and capacity in their play.

## Typical Development at 60 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Can take turns when playing with others and listens to their ideas.
- Understands the feelings of others and responds thoughtfully.
- Can talk about some things they like or don't like and say why.
- Plans and carries out their own ideas.
- Copes with new routines or when plans change.

### Communication and Language

- Asks and answers questions about stories and events.
- Uses language to express their imaginative ideas.
- Remember and recall detailed information e.g. the process of making a cake.
- Can talk about things that have happened, are happening or are going to happen using the correct tense.

### Physical Development

- Knows it is important to keep their bodies healthy with exercise and eating well.
- Can dress and undress independently.
- Is adventurous and confident in their physical play.

### Literacy

- Can recall what happened in a story.
- Uses letters or symbols to convey meaning.
- Recognises similarities in words e.g. words that rhyme or start with the same letter.

### Maths

- Can accurately count to find out how many things they have, up to and beyond 10.
- Beginning to recognise different numbers and put them in order.
- Knows a number can show how many things there are.
- Shows an interest in adding and taking away.
- Finds ways to measure in their play e.g. how many children will fit in a cardboard box.

## Typical Development at 66 Months

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Perseveres when things are hard.
- Cares about the feelings of others and knows when to help them.
- Knows that rules are important when playing in a group.
- Demonstrates patience in different situations.

### Communication and Language

- Listens in a group and talks about what they have heard.
- Begins to use humour and simple jokes.
- Shares their ideas with others expressing themselves clearly.

### Physical Development

- Balances well e.g. hops forward on one leg.
- Throws at a target and catches.
- Manages zips and buttons on their clothes.

### Literacy

- Attempts to write letters or words.
- Uses writing and drawing in their play.
- Reads words and simple sentences.
- Discusses the content and message of different texts.

### Maths

- Counts accurately and recognises numbers to 20.
- Recognises small quantities without counting.
- Adds and subtracts objects to find the total.
- Uses the language of measurement to order and compare e.g. tall, taller, tallest.



## Making Children Visible – Guidance for Practitioners

### Getting to know you – ‘Starting points’

- Within the first 6 weeks, the child’s development will be assessed against the OPAL age band they have most recently passed. This will inform us if the child has met developmental milestones.
- A video of the child at play will be shared with parents to start conversations about their child’s interests and needs.

### Each month there will be a group of ‘Spotlight children’ approaching their next milestone.

- Staff will spend time observing children’s play and learning.
- An OPAL Spotlight is completed at the end of the month.
- Actions will be planned to promote thinking and learning to support the child’s development.
- As a team we will meet to share what’s next for children.
- Staff meet with parents to discuss current knowledge and plans. Observations of the child at play will be shared.

### 2 months later. Review meeting.

- The key person shares their knowledge of the child’s play and learning over the last two months.
- Plans set for the child are evaluated.



## Making Children Visible – Guidance for OPAL Leads

- All children need to be plotted into the [OPAL Spotlight calendar](#) to identify their assessment and review points.
- Every new child will need an [OPAL Starting Point](#) completed within the first 6 weeks to identify children's starting points and children not yet meeting milestones.
- At BEYA, the lead practitioner for OPAL meets with staff individually at the end of each month. Together they monitor children's development against OPAL milestones and plan what's next. ([OPAL Spotlight](#)). This is shared with the staff team and parents.
- We look at children individually and as a monthly Spotlight group. ([OPAL Milestones](#)).
- Once a child has had 2 Spotlights, you can consider the progress that has been made.