



# Cylch Meithrin Awel y Mynydd on Effective Observations

Cylch Meithrin Awel y Mynydd is located within Ysgol Awel y Mynydd Primary School in Llandudno Junction, Conwy. The Cylch is an education provider, registered to deliver the 30 Hour Childcare Offer and offers Flying Start places. In this case study, Cheryl, the leader, outlines how the setting carries out effective observations and uses them to identify and support children's next steps in their learning journey. During their most recent Estyn inspection, it was noted that practitioners embed observation and



assessment naturally into their daily practice. They use this information highly effectively to plan purposeful provision that supports and promotes children's development.

*Practitioners use observations and assessment as a natural part of daily practice and use this information very successfully to plan provision that ensures children's development. They know the children exceptionally well and show pride and passion when discussing the achievement of those for whom they are key workers. They have a very productive partnership with parents. They discuss their children's needs and achievements with them regularly so that both gain a sound understanding of a child's needs. This ensures that they provide them with an extremely effective level of care.*

**Estyn Inspection Report July 2025.**

The setting received excellent judgements in all areas of their inspection report.



## How do you observe?

'We observe in a variety of ways throughout the session, ensuring that observation is a natural and embedded part of our daily practice. Often, we observe "in the moment" while playing alongside a child, engaging in sustained shared thinking and noticing how they explore, problem-solve and communicate. At other times, we step back and observe from a distance, allowing the child's independent play and interactions to unfold authentically.

We may also observe with a clear intention or invitation to learn, where we introduce a specific experience or enhancement to see how a child responds, applies prior knowledge, or develops new skills. However, we always approach observations with an open mind. We allow the child's interests, curiosity and spontaneous play to guide us, recognising that meaningful teachable moments often arise naturally rather than being planned.

We carry out a wide range of observations at different points throughout the session to gain a holistic understanding of each child. These include observations on entry to see emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn; during snack time to observe independence, communication and social skills; within group activities to notice collaboration and listening skills; and one-to-one interactions to focus on individual development.

Observations take place across all learning areas, both indoors and outdoors. We observe during story time and song sessions to identify language development and engagement, and during



social play to understand relationships, turn-taking and emotional regulation. By observing in varied contexts and at different times, we build a rich and accurate picture of each child's development, ensuring that our planning is responsive, meaningful and tailored to their next steps.'



## What do observations mean to you?

'To us, observations are an essential and highly valuable part of our daily practice. They are not simply a record of what a child has done, but a meaningful insight into how a child thinks, learns, interacts and develops. Observations inform and shape everything we do, directly influencing how learning evolves through carefully considered next steps.

Through consistent and thoughtful observation, we develop a deep understanding of each child as an individual — their interests, strengths, emerging skills and areas where they may need further support. This enables us to respond effectively, adapt provision, and plan experiences that are purposeful and engaging.

Observations help us to truly know our children well. By recognising their unique learning journeys, we can ensure that every child is supported to make progress and is given the opportunities, encouragement and challenge they need to reach their full potential.'



## How do you record your observations?

'We use a structured but flexible approach to recording observations to ensure they are meaningful and purposeful. Each week, we identify five focus children. For these children, we complete detailed observations using a focused observation sheet. This allows us to gather richer information about their learning, development, interests and emerging skills over a sustained period of time.

In addition to planned focus observations, we also record spontaneous "wow moments." These capture significant achievements, new skills, or notable interactions as they happen. Wow moments are often written on post-it notes so they can be recorded quickly and efficiently in the moment, ensuring important learning is not missed.

All observations are stored in the child's key worker folder. This ensures that key workers can review them during their allocated key worker week, reflect on progress, and use the information to inform planning and next steps. This organised system helps maintain continuity and ensures that every child's development is carefully monitored.

When recording observations, we ensure they are objective and factual. We focus on what we can see and



hear, avoiding assumptions or interpretations without evidence. We ask ourselves reflective questions such as:

- What did I notice?
- What does this tell me about the child's development?
- What have I learned about this child that I did not know before?
- What am I going to do with this information?

This reflective process ensures observations directly inform next steps and future provision.

We prioritise clarity and significance in our recordings. Observations should be meaningful and purposeful — quality over quantity is key. A small number of well-written, insightful observations are far more valuable than many brief, less purposeful ones.

We also pay close attention to identifying schemas in children's play. By noticing repeated patterns of behaviour and interests, such as transporting, enveloping, or trajectory, we gain a deeper understanding of how children are learning and exploring concepts. This helps us plan experiences that extend their thinking and support their developmental needs effectively.'



## How do you interpret your observations?

'Interpreting observations is a crucial part of our practice. We do not simply record what we see — we reflect on it carefully to understand what it tells us about the child as a learner and as an individual.'





The information gathered through observation helps us to identify each child's interests, fascinations and motivations. By recognising what truly engages them, we can enhance the environment to reflect those interests, ensuring that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant and purposeful.

Our observations directly inform future planning. They guide us in identifying appropriate next steps, adapting provision and introducing new challenges that build on what the child already knows and can do. This ensures progression is continuous and tailored to individual development.

We also use our observations to support children's behaviour and their social and emotional development. By understanding triggers, patterns, friendships and emotional responses, we can implement strategies that promote wellbeing, resilience and positive relationships.

Interpreting observations enables us to identify how best to support children in developing new skills while meeting their individual needs. We gain insight into their preferred ways of learning, their strengths, and areas where additional support or scaffolding may be required.

Observations also highlight children's likes and dislikes, helping us create a learning environment where they feel secure, valued and understood.

The information gathered contributes to our ongoing assessment processes. It ensures

that assessments are accurate, evidence-based and reflective of the whole child rather than isolated moments.

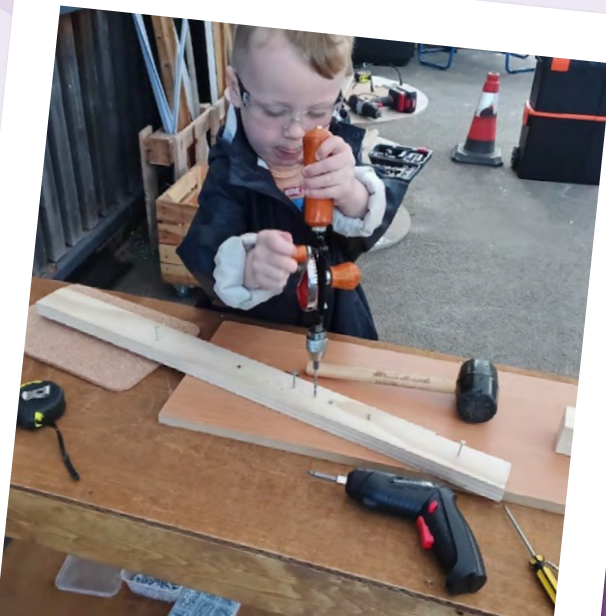
Importantly, careful interpretation of observations allows us to identify potential Additional Learning Needs (ALN) at an early stage. By recognising patterns or concerns promptly, we can seek appropriate support, implement targeted strategies and work in partnership with parents and external agencies where necessary.'

## How do you respond to your observations?

'Every third week we hold Keyworker Week, where the key worker has dedicated time to review all focused and "wow" observations recorded by staff. They reflect on the information and record notes in the child's Learning Journey booklet. This booklet is not a checklist, but a professional diary that tracks development across the curriculum and helps us know each child well.

The information gathered informs Flying Start reports, assessments for funded three-year-olds, and end-of-year reports, which are shared with parents and carers and the receiving nursery teacher to support smooth transition.

Where needed, key workers set targets and identify strategies to support individual needs, such as speech and language approaches.



Next steps are woven into planning and provision, and learning areas are enhanced or adapted to reflect children's interests and developmental needs. This ensures our observations lead to meaningful action and responsive support for every child.'



## Have you had any problems? How have you solved these?

As a team, we have experienced some challenges in developing a recording system that works consistently for everyone. Through a process of trial and error, we explored different methods of observing and recording to find an approach that was manageable, meaningful and sustainable for all staff.

We held open team discussions to reflect on what was working well and what was less effective. This collaborative approach ensured that everyone's views were valued and that any changes made were practical and realistic within daily practice.

As the leader, in collaboration with the staff, we reviewed and adapted the systems in place to ensure they supported different learning and working styles within the team. By refining the process together, we established a system that is clear, purposeful and accessible for all staff, ensuring consistency and quality in our observations.'

**Thank you to Cheryl Jones,  
Cylch Meithrin Awel y Mynydd, Conwy  
County Borough Council, Esyllt Evans  
and Joanne Hemsley for their help and  
support in creating this resource.**

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