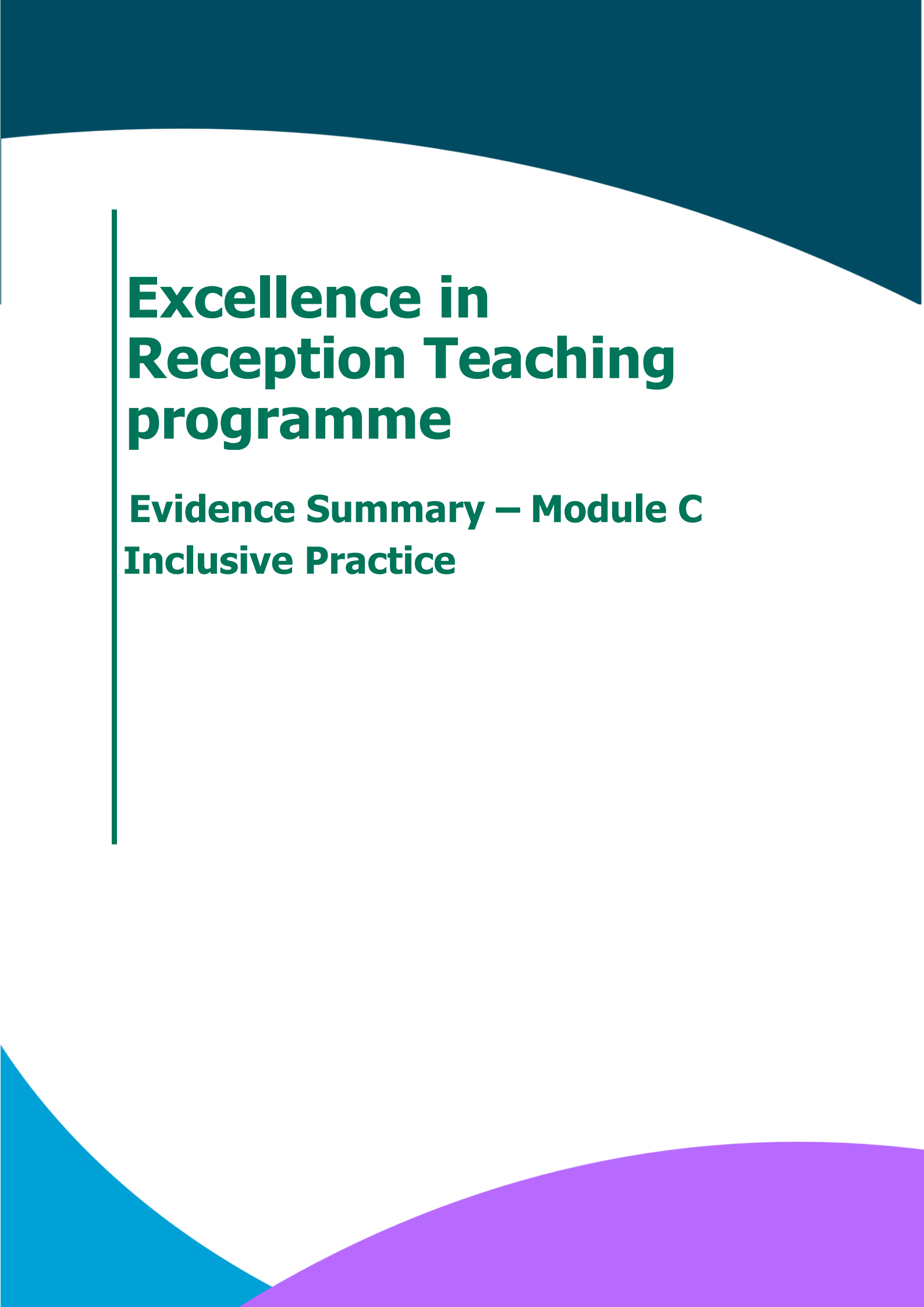




Excellence in Reception Teaching programme

**Evidence Summary – Module C
Inclusive Practice**

How to use this Evidence Summary

As you've worked through this chapter, you will have read about how the evidence has been applied to different scenarios and seen how it can be put into practice in classroom settings.

In this section, you can explore what the evidence says in more detail.

Navigate to the key theme you wish to look at and select the evidence that you would like to review, drawing on your diagnostic and reflections to guide your decision.

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Chapter 1: Inclusive Classrooms

Key theme 1

Key theme 2

Key theme 1: Designing the shared classroom so that more children can access the learning

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Start with an ambitious shared entitlement</u>	<u>Understand the child's starting point and the barrier</u>
<u>Treat routines and environments as part of teaching</u>	<u>Act promptly, then review what changes</u>

Start with an ambitious shared entitlement

Inclusive classrooms enable every child to participate, belong and learn. As an experienced Reception practitioner, you will know that this involves more than children being physically present in the same room. Meaningful inclusion depends on access to the curriculum, resources, relationships, routines and shared experiences of the setting (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

The SEND Code of Practice establishes children's entitlement to education that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and supports the fulfilment of potential. Children with SEND should participate in school life alongside their peers, with schools using their best endeavours to secure the support they require (DfE, 2015).

You may recognise the practical tension this creates. The curriculum should remain ambitious, while the classroom should not place avoidable demands between the child and that curriculum (DfE, 2015; Ofsted, 2024a; EEF, 2026).

Consider a familiar expectation in many Reception classrooms: children select and use mathematical resources independently. This remains a worthwhile ambition. However, independence is harder to develop if resources move frequently, several similar prompts compete for attention or children must cross a crowded area to find what they need (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Inclusive provision does not require every child to:

- occupy the same position in the room
- manage the same level of noise or movement
- access resources in an identical way
- communicate through the same mode
- receive the same amount of adult attention

Instead, your team needs to consider whether the shared classroom gives each child a realistic route into participation and success (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

EEF's two-part model brings together universal provision and the adaptations or additional support some children may require. These elements overlap. In your own provision, a predictable resource system might improve access for most children, while one child may also need a less visually demanding workspace or a reliable place to regulate (EEF, 2026).

Strengthening what happens every day can reduce, but will not remove, the need for individual adjustments. Calm spaces, familiar routines, accessible resources and positive relationships may benefit everyone while being essential for particular children (EEF, 2026).

A familiar temptation is to view the number of adaptations as evidence of inclusion. The evidence suggests that purpose matters more than quantity. An unnecessary adjustment may isolate a child, increase dependence or make access to the shared classroom less likely (EEF, 2026).

As you look around your classroom, it may be useful to ask:

- What should every child be able to access here?
- Which features currently support that access?
- Which features may create an avoidable barrier?
- What could be strengthened for everyone?
- Which children may still require an individual adjustment? (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

An inclusive classroom protects every child's access to ambitious learning, shared experiences and relationships, while recognising that equitable participation may require different environmental conditions or support (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Understand the child's starting point and the barrier

You may recognise how differently a child can respond to the same learning in different parts of the day. One response in one situation does not provide a complete account of knowledge, capability or motivation. Participation is shaped by the interaction between the child and the activities, relationships and environments they experience (EEF, 2020).

Children develop and learn at different rates and may respond differently to the same classroom conditions. A busy area may engage one child, distract another and create an overwhelming sensory demand for someone else (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Understanding need therefore involves noticing patterns. In your setting, participation may change according to:

- noise, movement or the number of children present
- visual information and the location of resources
- the familiarity of the routine
- the proximity of adults or peers
- the time of day
- whether the child can pause or seek help (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

These observations can help you distinguish between insecure curriculum knowledge and a barrier to demonstrating that knowledge.

Consider a child who compares quantities accurately when two collections are clearly presented but appears uncertain in a crowded mathematics area. You would have good reason to examine the environment before concluding that the mathematical understanding is absent (EEF, 2020).

The environment will not always provide the whole explanation. A child may have missing prior knowledge, need additional teaching or experience several interacting barriers. The important step is to consider the child, the curriculum and the context together before forming a fixed judgement (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

A diagnosis can add useful information, but it does not tell you precisely which classroom conditions will help. Children with the same diagnosis may have different strengths, sensory experiences and patterns of participation, which may also change over time (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Children themselves can contribute important knowledge. Depending on their development and communication, they may show what helps through speech, gesture, pictures, choices, movement or repeated responses in familiar situations (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020).

You may have known a child who says, “It is too loud.” Another child may communicate the same experience by covering their ears, leaving the area or becoming less able to organise their actions. These responses invite careful enquiry rather than immediate conclusions about behaviour or motivation (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Parents and carers can help you understand how the child responds elsewhere, which conditions support independence and whether a pattern is new or familiar. Their knowledge should contribute early, rather than only after an approach has been unsuccessful (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

Confidence and expectations may influence participation, but they are only part of the picture. Motivation is associated with achievement, while the average relationship between growth mindset and achievement is weak. Apparent reluctance should not distract attention from prior knowledge, classroom organisation, previous experience or sensory demand (Kriegbaum et al., 2018; Sisk et al., 2018).

Understanding need means noticing how participation changes across spaces, routines and relationships, then using that information to identify what the child knows and what the classroom may currently be making harder (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

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Treat routines and environments as part of teaching

You will know how much the organisation of a Reception classroom shapes what children notice, where they move, how they interact and how independently they use resources. The physical, sensory and relational environment is therefore part of the educational experience, not a neutral background to teaching (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

This includes:

- noise, lighting, movement and crowding
- physical layout and displays
- the number and location of resources
- routines and expectations
- adult positioning and availability

- interactions with peers
- access to spaces for regulation (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

A calm and predictable classroom can help children feel safe, focus and participate more fully. These conditions benefit everyone and may be particularly important for children experiencing additional communication, attention, sensory, emotional or executive-function demands (Carroll et al., 2017; EEF, 2019; DuPaul et al., 2014; EEF, 2026).

Calm does not mean silent, sparse or lacking in challenge. Your classroom should remain a rich place for talk, play, movement and exploration. The important question is whether the amount and organisation of stimulation supports the intended learning or competes with it (Ofsted, 2024a; EEF, 2026).

You may recognise an area where children spend more time searching, waiting or negotiating the space than engaging with the learning. Looking at it from a child's perspective can help:

- Can children identify the relevant resources?
- Are resources returned to predictable places?
- Do visual prompts have a current purpose?
- Can children move without repeated interruption?
- Do several sources of sound overlap?
- Is reduced sensory demand available when needed?
- Can a child pause without losing connection with learning or peers? (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

Small changes may have considerable value. In your setting, this might mean placing current counting resources together, removing unrelated trays, marking where equipment belongs or ensuring that nearby visual prompts reflect the current learning (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Routines also shape access. Clear, developmentally appropriate routines help children anticipate what will happen, understand expectations and manage more independently (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2026). Predictability does not require you to prevent all change. A recognisable purpose or sequence can remain while timing, language or cues are adjusted and children are prepared when something will be different (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2026)

You may also have found that one environment does not work equally well for every child. Some children may need different positioning, reduced sensory demand, an adapted workspace or temporary access to an alternative space for regulation (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026). Any alternative space should support regulation and reconnection with learning, rather than becoming an automatic form of separation or reduced curriculum access (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026)

Relationships are part of the environment too. Warm, reliable adults help children communicate discomfort, take manageable risks and return to learning after difficulty. Positive relationships with adults and peers strengthen participation and belonging (Ofsted, 2024b; EEF, 2026).

Your team need not use identical words, but adults should share an understanding of routines, barriers and the core response a child can expect. Conflicting responses can make an otherwise familiar environment less predictable (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

An inclusive classroom is calm without being empty, predictable without being rigid and adaptable without routinely separating children from the learning and relationships shared by their peers (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Act promptly, then review what changes

You may recognise how easy it is for a sensible adjustment to lose its purpose once several adults begin using it. Inclusive classroom design therefore requires deliberate implementation. A plausible idea will not necessarily improve children's experiences unless the team understands why it is being introduced, applies it coherently and reviews its effects (EEF, 2026).

When a barrier becomes apparent, you do not always need to wait for a formal diagnosis before making a proportionate change to the environment or routine. Early identification should lead to timely action, followed by careful review (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Begin with one precise classroom problem. For example:

"Several children spend more time locating the relevant resources than engaging with the mathematical learning, and this demand appears particularly significant for one child."

This is more actionable than deciding that the whole room is overstimulating or that the child cannot manage continuous provision (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

In your setting, a manageable first priority might be to:

- establish one predictable location for current resources
- remove prompts that are no longer relevant
- reduce movement through part of the area
- offer a quieter position nearby

- agree a familiar way for a child to request a pause (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

A small number of well-defined changes is more likely to influence practice than a long list of loosely connected adjustments. Effective implementation begins with an assessment of need and a focused set of priorities (EEF, 2026).

You will likely already have conversations to agree the essential features of the change, including where resources belong, what children will be taught about using the space, which individual adjustment remains available and what adults will look for when reviewing impact (EEF, 2026). This shared understanding helps the approach remain reliable when staffing changes and prevents access from depending on one practitioner.

Monitoring need not create extensive new paperwork. You can draw on everyday observations, children's communication, family dialogue and existing planning or SEND review processes (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

You might look for whether children:

- locate and return resources more independently
- begin learning with less adult direction
- remain engaged for longer
- communicate when the environment becomes difficult
- participate alongside peers
- use an alternative space purposefully and return
- demonstrate more of what they know (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

Review should also consider unintended effects. A quieter space may support regulation but increase isolation. Reducing resources may improve clarity but restrict worthwhile choice. An adult cue may help initially but later create unnecessary dependence (EEF, 2026).

The evidence may lead you to retain a change as universal provision, refine it, add an individual adjustment, reduce it as independence develops or remove it because it is not helping (EEF, 2026).

Children and families should contribute to this judgement. Their perspectives may reveal whether the change feels supportive, works across contexts and strengthens confidence and independence (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Sustaining inclusive classrooms is shared professional work. Practitioners need opportunities to discuss barriers, compare observations and deepen their understanding, while seeking specialist advice where needs remain persistent, complex or unclear (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

An inclusive classroom develops through purposeful changes that are implemented coherently and reviewed according to whether they improve access, belonging, participation and growing independence (EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 2: Making participation predictable across routines, relationships and shared language

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Predictability reduces avoidable demands</u>	<u>Meaningful participation depends on the social and communication environment</u>
<u>Security is created through relationships as well as routines</u>	<u>Adaptations should be prompt, connected and reviewed</u>

Predictability reduces avoidable demands

You will already know that a routine can be familiar while participation within it still feels uncertain. A child may know that story time is beginning, yet remain unsure when to contribute, how long to wait, whether gesture is acceptable or how adults will respond if their words are still emerging. Here, predictability is not mainly about moving children between activities. It is about making the routes into shared talk, play and learning easier to recognise (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Predictable participation can reduce demands on attention, working memory, communication and emotional regulation because children do not have to work out the social expectations afresh in every interaction (Carroll et al., 2017; DuPaul et al., 2014; EEF, 2026). This may be particularly important for some children with SEND, although the support required should not be inferred from a label alone (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

In your own setting, this might mean children regularly encounter:

- a familiar way to enter partner or group talk
- a clear indication of whose turn it is
- permission to show, point, gesture or speak
- enough waiting time for different forms of response
- recurring language linked to stories and provision

- an agreed way to pause and rejoin an interaction (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2018; EEF, 2026)

These features are not fixed scripts. Their purpose is to make participation understandable while preserving the spontaneity of conversation and play (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2026). A story discussion might, for example, allow children to look, show or talk with a partner before ideas are opened to the group. What children contribute remains responsive, but the route into contributing is familiar (EEF, 2026).

You may recognise a child who participates confidently in a paired retell but withdraws when several peers speak at once. That variation should not be treated as evidence that the child lacks understanding. It may show that the social and communication demands have changed more quickly than the learning itself (EEF, 2020; Ofsted, 2024b).

Predictability also depends on adults agreeing the purpose of the routine. Consistency does not require identical wording, but children benefit when teachers and teaching assistants allow similar response time, recognise the same communication modes and avoid speaking on the child's behalf too quickly (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

The useful question is not simply, "Is this routine familiar?" It is, "Can children anticipate how they can take part, and do adult responses keep that route open?"

Predictability supports inclusion when it makes participation easier to enter and sustain without narrowing the ideas, language or relationships that can develop within it (EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Meaningful participation depends on the social and communication environment

A child may be present in a shared experience without having a reliable way to enter the talk, influence the play or sustain an exchange. You may have seen this when a child watches closely, follows the humour or contributes through gesture, yet is overlooked because conversation moves on quickly. Inclusion therefore depends on the communication environment as well as the physical classroom (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; Ofsted, 2024b).

This environment includes the pace of talk, waiting time, adult responses to emerging language, whether peers recognise different ways of contributing and

how consistently vocabulary is revisited across stories, routines and provision (EEF, 2018; Law et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2024b).

Communication and language develop through purposeful interaction. Skilled practitioners notice children's words, gestures and actions, respond to the meaning, model and extend language, and leave space for the child to respond (Law et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2024b). The quality of these interactions is likely to matter more than simply increasing adult talk (Law et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2024b).

You may recognise the temptation to help by asking several questions, translating an idea immediately or directing peers towards what the adult thinks the child means. These responses are caring, but they can reduce the child's opportunity to communicate and peers' opportunity to listen and respond (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

For children learning English as an additional language, developing English should not be interpreted as limited understanding or evidence of a language disorder. Adults need to draw on family knowledge, observe communication across contexts and attend to what children express through all available languages and modes (Grenier, 2021; Law et al., 2017).

A stimulating and diverse text can create a shared reference point. Repeated phrases, illustrations, objects and role play may allow children to join before they are ready to contribute extended English. The same text can broaden vocabulary, representation and understanding for the whole class (Ofsted, 2024a; Ofsted, 2024b).

Some children will also require focused communication and language teaching. This should address a precisely identified capability and connect back to everyday classroom interaction, rather than becoming a separate experience with no clear route into peer relationships or curriculum participation (EEF, 2018; Law et al., 2017; EEF, 2026).

As you will have observed in your classroom, adults should look beyond who answers most often. There is great value in noticing who initiates, responds, sustains an exchange, uses gesture, joins a peer or transfers language between contexts (EEF, 2018; Ofsted, 2024b).

A communication-rich classroom is inclusive when children have meaningful ways to listen, respond and influence shared activity, with additional teaching used to strengthen rather than replace those opportunities (EEF, 2018; EEF, 2026).

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Security is created through relationships as well as routines

Children experience the predictability of a classroom partly through relationships. They learn whether adults will notice hesitation, allow time, take their communication seriously and help them remain connected when participation becomes difficult (Ofsted, 2024b; EEF, 2026).

Warm, attuned and responsive relationships provide a secure base from which children can explore, communicate and take manageable risks. Adults strengthen that security when they recognise what a child is expressing, maintain belief in their capability and do not make participation conditional on immediate spoken confidence (Ofsted, 2024b; EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026).

You may have met a child who remains near an interaction but does not yet enter it. One adult may interpret the watching as disengagement, another may ask repeated questions and another may explain the child's idea to peers. Each response may be well intended, but together they can make the child's experience less coherent (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

A shared understanding across teachers and teaching assistants can help.

Adults might agree:

- what the child already communicates and understands
- which forms of contribution should be recognised
- how much response time is usually helpful
- when an adult should help peers to wait or notice
- how a child can pause and re-enter
- what greater independence and connection would look like (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

This is not about identical scripts. Professional responsiveness remains essential. Coherence means that adults work from the same interpretation of the barrier and do not replace the child's communication with their own (EEF, 2026).

Peer relationships also require attention. A child continually positioned beside an adult may receive support but have fewer opportunities to exchange ideas, negotiate roles or develop friendships. Meaningful inclusion involves interaction with children as well as positive contact with practitioners (DfE, 2015; Ofsted, 2024b).

In your setting, a familiar partner or shared interest may provide an entry point, but it should not become a permanent arrangement that limits the child's

social world. Adults can preserve security while widening the peers and contexts in which participation becomes possible (EEF, 2026).

Families can strengthen this understanding by sharing how the child communicates confidence, uncertainty and interest elsewhere. Their perspective may reveal abilities or strategies that are less visible in the classroom (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

The aim is not continuous adult proximity. Support may initially involve reassurance, acknowledgement or a familiar participation cue, but it should create room for the child to communicate and connect with less mediation over time (EEF, 2026).

A secure classroom is built when children encounter warm relationships, coherent adult responses and genuine opportunities to belong with peers, rather than support that protects them by speaking or participating on their behalf (DfE, 2015; Ofsted, 2024b; EEF, 2026).

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Adaptations should be prompt, connected and reviewed

When a barrier affects participation, timely action is usually more helpful than waiting for complete certainty or a formal diagnosis. The SEND Code expects settings to identify needs early, use their best endeavours to secure appropriate support and enable children with SEN to participate alongside peers (DfE, 2015).

In an inclusive classroom, the first adjustment should be linked to a precise participation problem. Compare:

“The child lacks confidence in group talk.”

with:

“The child contributes during a paired retell but leaves when several conversations overlap and adults do not allow time for gesture or emerging English.”

The second description identifies where participation changes and gives the team something specific to test (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

A proportionate response might involve one or two connected changes:

- use a familiar way to enter shared talk
- recognise showing, pointing and speaking as valid starting points
- reduce overlapping talk in one part of provision

- agree how adults will protect response time
- ensure vocabulary from focused teaching reappears in stories and play (EEF, 2018; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

You may already gather the information needed through ordinary practice. Observations across contexts, children's communication, family dialogue and existing SEND reviews can show whether the adjustment is helping without creating a new recording system (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Review should look beyond whether the child appears quieter, more compliant or more willing to answer an adult. Stronger indicators might include whether the child:

- initiates or sustains more exchanges
- remains involved with peers for longer
- communicates a need before leaving
- uses words, gestures or symbols across contexts
- applies language introduced elsewhere
- requires less adult mediation
- contributes to shared play or discussion (EEF, 2018; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026)

The team should also check for unintended effects. A familiar partner may increase security but narrow relationships. A separate language activity may build vocabulary but remove the child from the context in which it needs to be used. Adult interpretation may keep interaction moving but reduce agency (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Some children will need focused or specialist teaching. Where required, it should address a clear communication capability, be delivered by knowledgeable adults and remain connected to the Reception curriculum and everyday interaction (EEF, 2018; Law et al., 2017; EEF, 2026).

Children, families, the SENCO and relevant professionals can help decide whether support should be retained, refined, intensified or reduced. Specialist advice should strengthen everyday participation rather than transfer responsibility from the team who teach the child (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020).

Prompt adaptation becomes inclusive when it improves access to shared language, relationships and learning, and when adults review whether participation is becoming more meaningful and less dependent on mediation (EEF, 2026).

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Chapter 2: Adaptive Teaching

<u>Key theme 1</u>	<u>Key theme 2</u>
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Key theme 1: Making small-group teaching more precise and responsive

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Start with strong teaching for everyone</u>	<u>Understand the barrier before choosing the support</u>	<u>Use what children show you to decide what happens next</u>
<u>A smaller group should change the teaching opportunity</u>	<u>Keep support connected to learning and independence</u>	

Start with strong teaching for everyone

Adaptive teaching starts with an engaging, high-quality curriculum that gives all children meaningful opportunities to participate, practise and experience success.

You may already recognise this in your Reception practice. Children may explore the same mathematical idea while adults vary modelling, resources or prompts. During a story, one child may need more time to respond while another is ready to explain further. The intended learning remains ambitious, but support changes in response to children's understanding and development. Small-group teaching should similarly be matched to children's current understanding and linked to classroom learning (EEF, 2019).

Some children will also need targeted teaching alongside the shared curriculum when they require additional support with a specific aspect of learning (EEF,

2026). Targeted small-group teaching can have a positive impact when it responds to an identified learning need (EEF, 2019). For example, structured teaching focused on listening, narrative and vocabulary improved spoken language outcomes for children with relatively low language skills (Sibieta et al, 2016). Small-group approaches may also be particularly valuable for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (EEF, 2023). This does not mean that disadvantage alone determines who needs additional support. Decisions should remain informed by ongoing assessment of children's individual learning needs (EEF, 2026).

Targeted support therefore sits alongside, rather than replaces, high-quality teaching for the whole class. Small-group teaching should remain connected to classroom learning (EEF, 2019; EEF 2026), and a single intervention is unlikely to address every aspect of learning or close attainment gaps on its own (EEF, 2023). Children still need meaningful access to the wider Reception curriculum.

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Understand the barrier before choosing the support

In everyday Reception practice, you may already notice that the same response from two children can mean different things. Formative assessment involves gathering evidence of learning and using it to inform what happens next (EEF, 2021a; Apthorp et al, 2017).

Consider a child who contributes little during a whole-class story. They may need more processing time, be unsure of the vocabulary or feel less confident speaking in a larger group. Similar responses may therefore lead to different teaching decisions. A diagnosis, identified need or broad characteristic may add useful information, but it does not automatically determine the most effective support in a particular learning moment. Adaptations should be informed by the specific task and ongoing assessment of the child's needs (EEF, 2026).

This professional judgement is central to formative assessment. Children's responses can reveal more about their thinking than whether an answer is simply correct (EEF, 2021a). Teachers interpret this alongside what they already know about the child before deciding how teaching might change (Sortwell et al, 2024).

You may already build this picture through interaction, observation and conversations with parents and carers. Assessment can draw on professional expertise and information shared by others without excessive paperwork. Children's contexts, backgrounds and prior experiences can help identify strengths and possible barriers, while information such as month of birth may add to this wider picture. This information should inform professional enquiry rather than predetermine the support a child receives (EEF, 2026).

This precision matters because small-group teaching is more likely to be effective when it responds to a specific learning need (EEF, 2019), and adaptations or additional support should be informed by ongoing assessment of children's needs (EEF, 2026). Approaches should reflect children's current development and progress (EEF, 2023).

Sometimes the next step is not more information but looking more closely at what has already been noticed. Ongoing monitoring does not necessarily require new systems or additional records (EEF, 2026). Consider whether adults across your team share enough understanding of the barrier to make coherent teaching decisions (Apthorp et al, 2017).

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Use what children show you to decide what happens next

You may already make small adjustments to teaching throughout the Reception day. A child rearranges five objects and recounts the whole set. Another repeats a new word but does not yet use it independently. A child manages a routine with a visual cue, then becomes unsure when the cue is removed.

These moments provide information about children's current understanding and needs. Formative assessment is most valuable when that information shapes a teaching decision. It involves gathering and interpreting evidence of learning, then using it to decide how teaching should respond (Apthorp et al, 2017; EEF, 2021a).

The response does not need to be a new activity. You might model again, change a prompt, give more time, provide further practice or reduce support. Effective adaptation may strengthen or increase the intensity of familiar teaching approaches rather than require a separate task (EEF, 2026).

Paying attention to what children's responses reveal about their thinking can be more informative than focusing only on whether they are correct or complete a task (EEF, 2021a).

You may recognise how quickly this happens. A child asked to show five in a different arrangement recounts from one each time. Rather than simply recording that they 'need support with five', the adult uses this response to decide what to emphasise next.

Adult: "How many are there?"

Child: counts each object "One, two, three, four, five."

The adult rearranges the same five objects.

Adult: "How many now?"

The child starts to count again.

Adult: "Pause. Did I add any or take any away?"

Child: "No."

Adult: "So what do you think?"

Child: "Five."

Adult: "Yes. They moved, but there are still five."

The adult has not introduced a new activity. They have used the child's response to change the prompt and find out more about their understanding. Rather than concluding that the child simply "needs support with five", they now have a clearer idea of what to revisit and practise next. The adult has changed the prompt without simplifying the mathematical idea or removing the need for the child to think. The adaptation is specific to what the child's response has revealed, rather than being based on a broad assumption about their ability (EEF, 2026).

Formative assessment is an ongoing process of gathering, interpreting and using information so teaching can be adjusted in a timely way (Apthorp et al, 2017). Professional judgement is central to interpreting what children show and deciding how teaching should change (Sortwell et al, 2024).

An adaptation is not the end of the process. Adaptations can help or hinder learning, so notice how the child responds and use this to refine what happens next (Apthorp et al, 2017; Sortwell et al, 2024; EEF, 2026). Support may need to be increased, changed, reduced or removed as the child's needs change (EEF, 2026).

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A smaller group should change the teaching opportunity

You will already be using small-group teaching regularly. Small groups can create opportunities for closer interaction, sustained engagement and feedback matched more closely to children's understanding (EEF, 2019). The important question is what the adult can notice or do differently because the group is smaller.

In the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, structured small-group and individual teaching focused on listening, narrative and vocabulary improved

children's spoken language outcomes (Sibieta et al, 2016). This reflects wider evidence that targeted teaching can positively affect outcomes when it responds to an identified need (EEF, 2019).

Not every small group is a targeted intervention. A smaller group may simply create a more responsive teaching opportunity within the Reception curriculum. Where additional support takes the form of a structured intervention, the evidence places greater emphasis on careful matching to a specific need, regular delivery and preparation for the adult delivering it (EEF, 2026).

Effective small-group teaching depends on identifying the learning need, matching teaching to children's current understanding and preparing adults for high-quality interaction and feedback (EEF, 2019). Adaptations and additional support should be task-specific, informed by ongoing assessment and adjusted as children's needs change (EEF, 2026).

You may recognise this in your own practice. The next consideration is consistency. Do all adults understand what children are working towards, what they will model or practise and what children's responses may reveal? Training, preparation and effective communication between teachers and teaching assistants can strengthen the delivery of targeted support (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026; Sibieta et al, 2016).

Simple shared prompts can make the purpose of everyday small-group teaching visible. A teaching assistant supporting this classroom teaching does not necessarily need a detailed lesson plan, but does need clarity about the intended learning, the barrier being addressed and what children's responses may reveal (EEF, 2025). Structured interventions may require greater preparation, training and supporting resources so that their core components are delivered consistently (Sibieta et al, 2016; EEF, 2026). This supports timely, targeted teaching informed by children's strengths, contexts and possible barriers.

Where children attended Nursery, previous knowledge of their learning may help Reception adults understand what has already been taught, practised or supported. In the Nuffield study, the longer programme began in Nursery and continued into Reception and produced stronger language outcomes than the shorter Reception-only programme (Sibieta et al, 2016). The finding does not tell us which feature of the longer programme caused the difference, but it reinforces the importance of considering the intensity and progression of targeted support rather than treating a group as a one-off activity (Sibieta et al, 2016; EEF, 2026).

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Keep support connected to learning and independence

Targeted teaching should help children use developing knowledge and skills beyond the small-group or one-to-one interaction. Additional support should be considered alongside and integrated with everyday teaching, rather than becoming a separate learning experience (EEF, 2026). Small-group support is most effective when it is closely linked to classroom learning, giving children further opportunities to use what they have practised (EEF, 2019).

You may already create these connections across the Reception day. A child rehearses vocabulary with an adult, then meets the same words in a story or play. Another practises composing a number, then applies this during a counting routine. Repetition can support targeted teaching (Sibieta et al, 2016), while approaches should remain matched to children's developing knowledge and progression (EEF, 2023).

What happens next provides further information. Can the child use the word without a model, apply an idea in a new context or manage when a prompt is reduced? Children's responses can inform timely adjustments (Apthorp et al, 2017), with support refined as adults learn more about their understanding (Sortwell et al, 2024).

Adult: "Yesterday we used the word enormous when we talked about the whale."

Child: "It was really big."

Adult: "Yes. What was our word for really big?"

Child: "Enormous."

Later, during construction play, the child looks at a tall tower.

Child: "Look at my enormous tower!"

Adult: "You remembered that word."

The earlier repetition showed that the child could recall the word with a prompt. Its spontaneous use during play provides different information about how independently the child can use the learning. Monitoring children's responses in this way helps adults judge whether additional support is helping and how it may need to change (Apthorp et al, 2017; EEF, 2026).

This matters for independence. Teaching should adapt levels of support until children can master activities more independently. Effective scaffolding is temporary, informed by what a child can currently manage and gradually removed as responsibility shifts towards the child (EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026). A

scaffold that was helpful yesterday may therefore need to change, reduce or be removed as the child's needs change.

Targeted support must also be sustainable. In the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, teaching assistants found it difficult to protect delivery time, and senior support was needed alongside wider responsibilities (Sibieta et al, 2016). Implementation matters because even a well-matched intervention may be difficult to deliver effectively if adults lack preparation, communication or protected opportunities for regular delivery (EEF, 2026).

Keep looking beyond the supported moment. Notice where children use learning again and whether the support is helping them think, participate and act with increasing independence. Adjust, reduce or remove support as children's needs change (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2023; EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 2: Adapting support while protecting access and ambition

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Protect access to shared teaching</u>	<u>Change the route in, not the ambition</u>	<u>Support without taking over</u>
<u>Keep targeted support connected to the curriculum</u>		

Protect access to shared teaching

You may already adapt adult support so that children who need additional help can take part in shared learning. The first priority for children with additional or special educational needs remains strengthening the quality of classroom teaching, while recognising that some children may also need adaptations or targeted support. Universal teaching and additional support should be considered together as complementary parts of inclusive practice, rather than as separate stages (EEF, 2026). Research suggests that approaches used for children with special educational needs are often not fundamentally distinct from effective teaching for other children, although individual differences still need careful attention (Davis et al, 2004).

The evidence also invites us to look closely at children's actual experience of teaching. Pupils with SEND can spend less time in whole-class teaching, with the teacher and alongside peers when teaching assistants take on a substantial direct instructional role (EEF, 2020). Well-intended support can therefore create greater separation if adults become a child's main route into learning (EEF, 2020).

For example, a child may often have an adult nearby during shared teaching. This can provide reassurance and help the child feel supported. However, if adults repeat the teacher's instruction immediately or prompt before the child has had time to watch, process and attempt a response, the support may reduce access rather than increase it. The intention is to help the child participate, but the result may be fewer opportunities to attend to the teacher, process the teaching and learn alongside peers (EEF, 2025).

This illustrates why well-intended adaptations should be monitored rather than assumed to improve learning. Support can help or hinder depending on how it is used (EEF, 2026).

This may confirm questions you already ask about adult deployment. The next step is to consider how intentionally these decisions are made across the team. The next step is to consider how intentionally these decisions are made across the team. When a child needs additional support, adults should continue to examine whether that support strengthens the child's access to high-quality teaching and how it sits alongside the approaches used across the classroom (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Change the route in, not the ambition

In Reception, adults routinely vary modelling, resources and support so that children can engage with important learning in different ways. Often, effective adaptation strengthens familiar elements of high-quality teaching through additional modelling, examples, feedback or opportunities to practise (EEF, 2026). Responsive adaptation can support children who are learning at different rates (Deunk et al, 2018; EEF, 2026). The evidence does not, however, suggest that effective adaptation is defined by creating a different task for every child. Effective adaptations are more likely to be task-specific and informed by children's current needs. Creating separate or oversimplified tasks can reduce the thinking children need to do (EEF, 2026).

Grouping can provide a context for responsive teaching, but grouping alone does not guarantee that teaching is well matched to children's needs. Fixed, homogeneous ability grouping may also disadvantage lower-attaining pupils (Deunk et al, 2018). Similarly, highly individualised activities can be difficult to organise and monitor and may leave adults with less time for high-quality teaching interactions (EEF, 2021b).

Consider children retelling a familiar story. One child uses picture prompts while the adult models how to sequence the events.

Adult: "What happened first?"

Child: "The bear went into the cave."

Nearby, another child retells the same story without prompts and explains why the character acted as they did.

The route into the learning is different, but the important learning remains ambitious and shared. The picture prompts and modelling provide task-specific support for sequencing. They do not remove the child's responsibility to recall and communicate the events of the story. This protects the child's thinking while increasing access to the intended learning (EEF, 2026). Adaptive teaching is less valuable when it artificially creates distinct tasks or lowers expectations for particular children (Deunk et al, 2018; EEF, 2026).

This may confirm choices already embedded in your practice. The challenge is whether those choices remain intentional and flexible across adults and classrooms. Flexible groups should respond to children's current learning and be reviewed as children progress. Adaptations should be proportionate, timely and changed or removed when they are no longer required (EEF, 2026).

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Support without taking over

Across a Reception day, adults constantly judge when to step in and when to give a child more time. That judgement matters because adult support can help children engage with learning, but over-prompting or prioritising task completion can reduce children's opportunities to think and foster dependence (EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026). Well-intended support therefore needs to be judged by whether it is helping rather than hindering learning (EEF, 2026).

The principle of scaffolding is to provide temporary, task-specific support informed by what a child can currently manage, helping them proceed with increasing independence (EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026). EEF guidance recommends giving the least support first: allowing time to think and try, then moving from a prompt or clue towards modelling or more direct correction only when needed (EEF, 2025).

Consider a child fastening their coat.

Adult: "Put this arm in. Now turn it. Give it to me."

The routine is completed quickly.

Another adult waits.

Adult: "What do you need to do first?"

The child hesitates, so the adult points to the sleeve. When the child is still unsure, the adult models the first movement and lets the child continue.

Both adults are trying to help. The first interaction achieves task completion, but it gives the adult limited information about what the child can manage independently. The second preserves the need for the child to think and allows support to increase in response to what they show (EEF, 2026). The difference is that the second interaction gives the child more opportunity to take responsibility before additional support is added.

Effective scaffolding should provide the right amount of task-specific help at the right time and be reduced as the child becomes more able to proceed independently (EEF, 2025; EEF, 2026).

Making adult decisions visible can help support become more consistent. A shared principle such as Give children time to try. Add the least help needed can help adults respond coherently without requiring identical scripts. Shared understanding of the core principles of support can help staff make context-sensitive decisions more consistently (EEF, 2026).

This matters because teaching assistants should supplement, rather than replace, high-quality teaching, and poorly considered deployment can increase children's dependence on adult support or reduce access to the teacher and peers (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2025).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Keep targeted support connected to the curriculum

Targeted support can be an important part of inclusive Reception practice, particularly when children need increased or more specialised help with language and communication. Interventions are most effective as additional support that supplements and is integrated with high-quality everyday teaching, rather than replacing it (EEF, 2026). The question is whether that support remains closely connected to the teaching and learning children experience across the rest of the day.

EEF guidance cautions that children can miss classroom teaching, subjects they enjoy and opportunities to learn alongside peers when they are withdrawn for interventions. It also stresses that children should not be expected to make the links between intervention content and classroom learning for themselves (EEF, 2020).

This places a responsibility on adults to consider the whole learning experience. A targeted language session might include explicit vocabulary teaching, visual support, modelling and repeated oral rehearsal led by a skilled practitioner. Structured language teaching has improved spoken language outcomes when

support is focused on identified needs and delivered by trained adults (Sibieta et al, 2016). Its place in the timetable is only part of the decision. Adults also need shared clarity about the learning focus and how it connects to the Reception curriculum. Effective communication between the class teacher and the practitioner delivering support helps keep intervention learning connected to classroom content (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

Targeted interventions should be timely, closely aligned with the curriculum, minimise time away from the classroom, include clear measures of success and be regularly reviewed. Not every intervention is effective, so additional support should not be assumed to help simply because it is structured or targeted (EEF, 2026). Adults need to check that the intervention is matched to a specific barrier, can be delivered consistently by a trained practitioner and is worth what the child may miss while taking part (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2026).

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Chapter 3: Early Identification

<u>Key theme 1</u>	<u>Key theme 2</u>
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Key theme 1: Building a clearer picture before deciding what a child needs

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Early identification starts with curiosity, not certainty</u>	<u>Gather information because it changes what you do</u>	<u>Use what children show you to test your thinking</u>
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Early identification starts with curiosity, not certainty

Children do not develop or learn in a single, predictable sequence. Early development involves interacting strands and different pathways, influenced by children's experiences and the contexts in which learning takes place (Evangelou et al, 2009; DfE, 2023a). You will already see this variation in Reception. Children of the same age may communicate, regulate themselves, move, play or approach new learning differently, and may require different types or levels of support to succeed (Evangelou et al, 2009; DfE, 2023a).

This makes early identification more complex than checking whether a child has reached an expected point. Development Matters describes developmental pathways in broad ages and stages but cautions that children's actual learning is less orderly, so these should guide rather than replace professional judgement (DfE, 2023a). Children who are finding aspects of early learning difficult should not be regarded as having fixed low ability, and being at an earlier stage does not by itself explain why a difficulty is occurring (DfE, 2023a)

Information about the child's wider context can help you interpret what you see:

- their month of birth
- previous opportunities to learn
- experience of the setting
- transitions and family circumstances

You will have seen how these may all contribute useful information when considered alongside assessment and observation (Evangelou et al, 2009; Curran, 2020; Griggs et al, 2017). For example, being one of the youngest children in Reception may help you understand some developmental variation, but it should not automatically explain away a difficulty that is persistent or affecting participation.

The same principle applies to support. Differentiation can be beneficial when it responds to genuine learner needs, but simply grouping children differently does not ensure that support is well matched (Deunk et al, 2018). More individualised support is most useful when accurate assessment has identified the particular knowledge, skill or barrier that needs addressing (EEF, 2021a). Early identification therefore begins by asking what you know, what remains uncertain and what further information would help you understand the child more precisely.

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Gather information because it changes what you do

Parents and carers can add evidence that you cannot see in the Reception classroom. Strong, respectful communication can help you understand how a child communicates, plays and responds in other contexts, whether the pattern is familiar to the family and whether anything has changed recently (DfE, 2023a; Curran, 2020; Griggs et al, 2017). Research with early years settings highlights the importance of communicating concerns specifically, describing what has been noticed rather than presenting an interpretation as an established conclusion (Griggs et al, 2017).

As the picture develops, assessment should remain proportionate and purposeful. Development Matters emphasises that assessment is about noticing what children know and can do and making informed decisions about what they need next, rather than generating large quantities of data (DfE, 2023a).

Formative assessment is similarly valuable when evidence is used to:

- adapt teaching

- or support in response to an identified need (Apthorp et al, 2017; Sortwell et al, 2024).

Sometimes everyday observation and responsive teaching will provide enough information to identify an appropriate next step. At other times, a more structured assessment may help clarify a specific communication or language barrier. Targeted assessment can help identify particular gaps or barriers so that subsequent teaching is better matched to the child's needs (EEF, 2021a). Where an evidence-based diagnostic tool is appropriate, it should therefore add to, rather than replace, your professional knowledge of the child and the wider evidence already gathered (DfE, 2023a; EEF, 2021a).

The important question is not whether you have collected enough evidence to attach a conclusion. It is whether the information is helping you make a more accurate decision. Early identification is valuable when noticing leads to:

- timely action
- support is matched to what has been understood

and the child's subsequent response helps you decide whether that understanding needs to be retained, refined or investigated further (DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2023a; Black et al, 2009).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Use what children show you to test your thinking

In Reception, much of your assessment happens while you teach, talk, play and interact with children. Its value comes not from how much information you collect, but from how you use what children show you to make better-founded decisions about what happens next (Black et al, 2009; Apthorp et al, 2017; DfE, 2023a).

This requires interpretation. A child's brief answer, hesitation, difficulty following an instruction or reliance on another child does not tell you automatically why it happened. Their response might reflect understanding of the language, familiarity with the task, prior experience, confidence, attention to contextual cues or the particular demands of that moment (Black et al, 2009). Black and Wiliam therefore distinguish simply checking whether an answer is correct from listening interpretively to what the response may reveal about the child's thinking (Black et al, 2009).

One observation can raise a useful question. A pattern across contexts is more informative. Targeted observation can help when it is designed around

something specific you need to understand rather than simply producing more records (Apthorp et al, 2017; Curran, 2020). You might, for example, compare what a child understands during familiar play with what happens when an adult introduces less familiar language, or notice whether demonstration, gesture or additional processing time changes their response. What happens after you adjust teaching can itself provide further evidence for your interpretation (Black et al, 2009; Sortwell et al, 2024).

A holistic picture also draws on knowledge beyond a single classroom moment. Early years SENCOs report using targeted observations, staff knowledge and information about children's wider circumstances when investigating possible additional needs (Curran, 2020). Studies of early years settings similarly show that practitioners recognise that children may behave and communicate differently across environments or while adjusting to a new setting (Griggs et al, 2017). Bringing these pieces together helps you distinguish an observation from an interpretation and keep that interpretation open to revision.

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Key theme 2: Moving from concern to proportionate action

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Notice early without concluding early</u>	<u>Build a holistic picture before deciding what the pattern means</u>
<u>Use assessment and diagnostic tools to clarify a specific question</u>	<u>Act early, then use the child's response as further evidence</u>

Notice early without concluding early

Early identification does not mean reaching a conclusion as quickly as possible. You will already know from Reception practice that development is variable and that the same observable difficulty can have different explanations. A delay in learning and development may or may not indicate SEND, while slow progress, disruptive behaviour or withdrawal should not automatically lead to a child being identified as having SEN (DfE, 2015). Development Matters similarly cautions that children's learning does not follow a neat sequence and that children who struggle in their early learning should not be viewed as having fixed low ability (DfE, 2023a).

The four broad areas of need can provide a useful starting point:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional and mental health
- sensory and physical needs

However, children's needs may overlap, change over time and look different in different contexts. A broad category or diagnosis therefore cannot tell you, by itself, what an individual child needs from teaching or provision (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020a).

This distinction matters because a diagnosis can provide useful general information while still offering an incomplete guide to everyday teaching. Two children with the same diagnosis may have substantially different educational

needs, while children without a formal diagnosis may nevertheless require additional support (EEF, 2020a).

Your professional task is therefore to ask what the child is finding difficult, where the difficulty occurs, what they manage successfully and what might be contributing to the pattern. Changes in routine, transitions, attendance, family circumstances and the demands of particular environments can all influence what adults observe (DfE, 2015; Curran, 2020; Griggs et al, 2017).

The purpose of identification is to understand need well enough to decide what action is required, rather than to fit the child into a category (DfE, 2015).

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Build a holistic picture before deciding what the pattern means

Early identification becomes more reliable when you bring together information that no single observation, adult or context can provide. The SEND Code expects practitioners to consider information from learning and development, observation, assessment, parents and carers and, where relevant, specialist advice (DfE, 2015).

Your own observations remain important, but targeted observation is most useful when it answers a particular uncertainty. Early years SENCOs describe combining frequent, focused observations with staff knowledge and information about children's wider circumstances to understand emerging needs (Curran, 2020). Research in early years settings similarly shows that practitioners recognise children may communicate or behave differently across environments, particularly during periods of transition or while settling into a new setting (Griggs et al, 2017).

Parents and carers add knowledge that the Reception classroom cannot provide. Early conversations can help establish:

- the child's strengths and difficulties
- whether the family has noticed a similar pattern
- what happens in other contexts
- recent changes or experiences
- the family's concerns and priorities

(DfE, 2015; EEF, 2020a; Curran, 2020).

Communication needs to remain specific and respectful. Early years research shows the importance of describing precisely what has been observed rather

than allowing a limited concern to become a generalised description of the child (Griggs et al, 2017).

Particular care is needed when children are learning English as an additional language. Difficulties arising solely from learning English are not SEN. You therefore need to consider learning and development more broadly and explore what the child understands and communicates in their home language as well as English (DfE, 2015; DfE, 2023a).

A holistic approach does not mean investigating indefinitely. It means gathering the information that will make the next decision more accurate.

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Use assessment and diagnostic tools to clarify a specific question

You will already use assessment continually in Reception. For early identification, the important question is whether additional assessment will tell you something useful that everyday observation has not yet established.

Development Matters emphasises that assessment should be accurate, proportionate and guided by professional judgement rather than becoming a checklist or exercise in collecting data. Observation checkpoints can alert you when a child may be at risk of falling behind, but their purpose is to prompt closer monitoring and informed decisions about additional help (DfE, 2023a).

Where an emerging concern remains unclear, the SENCO can help determine what further information is needed. Evidence from schools shows SENCOs combining referrals and observations with ongoing assessment information and, where appropriate, more structured or standardised assessments before deciding on support (Carroll et al, 2017).

An evidence-based diagnostic tool should therefore answer a specific professional question. For example:

- Is there a particular communication or language barrier that requires further support?
- Does more detailed assessment indicate a difficulty not apparent from everyday interaction?
- Would specialist expertise help distinguish between possible explanations?

(DfE, 2015; Carroll et al, 2017).

Tools should add to, rather than replace, what you know about the child. Diagnostic categories provide general rather than complete information about educational need, so family knowledge, professional observation and the child's experience of learning remain important when interpreting results (EEF, 2020a).

You also need to recognise where your own expertise ends. When progress remains limited or the nature of the need requires specialist knowledge, the SEND Code expects practitioners, SENCOs, parents and appropriate professionals to work together to decide what further assessment or support is required (DfE, 2015).

The aim is not to accumulate evidence until certainty is possible. It is to obtain enough reliable information to make the next decision better founded.

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Act early, then use the child's response as further evidence

Careful identification should never become a reason to wait while a child continues to experience an avoidable barrier. Early identification has value when it is followed by effective provision, and practitioners should respond to emerging difficulties promptly (DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2015; DfE, 2023a).

You can often begin by strengthening high-quality universal provision while adding proportionate adaptations or support. Effective adaptations are typically informed by the specific task and current need, timely, integrated into classroom teaching and removed or changed when they are no longer required (EEF, 2026). They should maintain ambitious learning rather than reducing thinking because adults have made assumptions about SEND or attainment (EEF, 2026).

Equality matters here too. Treating every child identically can still create disadvantage. Settings need to consider whether routines, environments or practices create barriers for disabled children and whether reasonable adjustments are required to enable equitable participation (Government Equalities Office, 2013; DfE, 2015).

Support also provides further information. The graduated approach of assess, plan, do and review recognises that a child's response to intervention can help clarify the nature of their needs and inform what happens next (DfE, 2015).

The same principle applies to grouping. Flexible grouping can create useful opportunities for responsive teaching, but grouping alone does not ensure that

support is matched to need and should not become a fixed judgement about ability (Deunk et al, 2018; EEF, 2026).

If progress remains limited despite purposeful, evidence-informed support, further specialist assessment or referral may be appropriate (DfE, 2015; Carroll et al, 2017).

Early identification therefore remains a cycle:

notice → understand → act → review → refine or seek further support

Its value lies in enabling children to receive timely, appropriate support that strengthens participation, progress and the fulfilment of their potential (DfE, 2015; EEF, 2026).

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Chapter 3: References

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