



Progression of Continuous Provision

Pre-School → Reception

Purpose. This document complements an existing core-skills progression. It focuses on the progression of continuous provision: how resources, organisation, choice, scale, complexity and adult interaction can develop from Pre-School into Reception, creating implicit challenge through the enabling environments.

EYFS context. The approach reflects the emphasis in Development Matters on carefully organised enabling environments, play, modelling, guided learning and sensitive extension. The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning—Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, and Creating and Thinking Critically—sit across all areas.

1. What ‘implicit challenge’ looks like

- **Scale:** large → medium → small; whole-hand manipulation → increasing fingertip precision.
- **Choice:** a small, purposeful selection → wider choice → children independently selecting what they need.
- **Complexity:** single actions → linked steps → sustained sequences and multi-stage projects.
- **Open-endedness:** one obvious use → several possible uses → resources whose purpose children decide.
- **Problem-solving:** exploration → a small problem to solve → children design, test, adapt and evaluate solutions.
- **Representation:** exploring real objects → representing familiar experiences → deliberately communicating ideas.
- **Collaboration:** parallel play → shared play → negotiated, sustained collaborative projects.
- **Independence:** adult modelling → prompts and questions → children initiate, sustain and adapt play.
- **Language:** everyday vocabulary → precise descriptive/comparative vocabulary → subject-specific and explanatory language.

2. Progression of provision by area

Language and Literacy

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Provide abundant mark-making opportunities across the environment: chunky crayons, chalk, paintbrushes, water brushes, pencils, pens, large paper, clipboards, envelopes, notebooks, cards, sand/flour trays, dough, sticks and natural materials. Embed writing materials in meaningful play.	Increase variety and control: thinner tools, whiteboards, sticky notes, labels, lists, tickets, forms, message pads, stencils, letter/shape resources and smaller mark-making surfaces. Place writing and mark-making materials inside other areas so children can communicate for a reason.	Embed language, reading and writing opportunities throughout provision: maps, plans, instructions, menus, signs, captions, lists, messages, labels, storybooks and simple records. Offer paper of different sizes and formats, clipboards, envelopes, writing tools, books and mark-making materials. Continue large-scale sensory mark making where useful.	Challenge comes through rich talk, vocabulary, storytelling, purposeful mark making, increasing control, selecting an appropriate tool/format, communicating meaning and developing independence—not simply producing longer pieces of writing.

Reading

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Cosy, inviting access to quality picture books, repeated stories, rhymes, puppets, story props and meaningful environmental print.	Broaden text types: story, rhyme, information, poetry, non-fiction and familiar cultural stories. Add story stones, puppets, props, sequencing images and meaningful print.	Offer a rich mix of fiction and non-fiction, poetry, information books, maps, catalogues, menus, magazines and child-created books. Include props that encourage retelling, sequencing, story-making and following information.	Challenge comes through increasing text variety, sustained engagement, retelling, connecting information and using print for real purposes.

Maths

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Objects for matching, sorting, counting, comparing and pattern: natural collections, counters, cubes, inset puzzles, shape resources and containers.	Increase variety and complexity: ten frames, dice, dominoes, number tracks, bead strings, pattern blocks, balances, measuring tools, shape construction and spatial puzzles.	Use open-ended resources for composition, comparison, measurement, spatial reasoning and problem-solving: loose parts, dice, number manipulatives, tangrams, construction shapes, scales, timers, rulers and calendars. Add opportunities to represent thinking.	Challenge comes through changing representations, increasing combinations, spatial reasoning, estimating, measuring and applying maths in meaningful play.

Gross Motor

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Provide large, accessible spaces and equipment for climbing, crawling, balancing, pushing, pulling, carrying, throwing, kicking, dancing and moving in different ways. Resources might include low-level balance equipment, tunnels, large blocks, balls, hoops, scarves, crates and wheeled toys.	Increase opportunities for coordination, balance, agility and combining movements: beams/planks at varied heights, stepping stones, obstacle routes, larger balls, quoits, skipping ropes, scooters, trikes, wheelbarrows, crates and loose parts for building movement challenges.	Provide flexible apparatus and open-ended equipment that allows children to design and adapt movement challenges: climbing structures, balance trails, crates/planks, balls, bats, hoops, ropes, wheeled equipment, parachutes, den-building materials and large loose parts. Include opportunities to follow, invent and sequence movements and games.	Challenge comes through distance, height, speed, direction, balance, coordination, agility, sequencing, spatial awareness and children choosing how to adapt a physical challenge. Offer different levels of difficulty so challenge is responsive rather than age-fixed.

Fine Motor

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Posting, large threading, peg boards, playdough, large tweezers/tongs, chunky puzzles, nuts and bolts, containers with lids.	Increase precision and resistance: smaller threading, tweezers, bead patterns, clips, fasteners, lacing, pipettes, scissors and construction pieces.	Offer small manipulatives, detailed peg boards, sewing/lacing, tweezers, mini construction, nuts and bolts, paper folding, hole punching and fine-scale pattern work. Provide tools that strengthen control without relying on handwriting worksheets.	Challenge comes from precision, bilateral coordination, force control, sequencing and sustained manipulation.

Role Play

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Familiar domestic and community roles with accessible, realistic props: home, shop, café, doctor, baby care and other familiar experiences.	Rotate contexts based on children's experiences. Add real objects, uniforms, menus, receipts, appointment cards, bags, phones, maps and signs.	Use broader, less-prescribed spaces and open-ended props. Provide authentic print, writing materials, measuring equipment, maps, plans and resources that support children to invent and sustain scenarios.	Challenge comes from moving from imitation to sustained, negotiated imaginative play, with children taking roles, solving problems and organising the environment.

Small World

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Familiar animals, people, vehicles, simple homes/farms, natural materials, blocks, fabric, ramps and containers.	Introduce varied landscapes, community buildings, roads, bridges, signs, maps, loose parts and figures from different contexts. Add props that encourage stories, journeys and relationships between characters.	Provide detailed, flexible environments with maps, terrain, transport networks, buildings, signs, natural and manufactured loose parts. Include tickets, labels, clipboards and simple plans for children who want them.	Challenge comes from the number of relationships children can create: characters, places, journeys, problems and changing scenarios.

Expressive Arts and Design

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Open-ended paper, chunky crayons, paint, glue, dough, collage materials, natural materials, large brushes, rollers, stampers and simple instruments. Provide space for sensory exploration, music, movement, singing and imaginative making.	Broaden the range of media and tools: scissors, thinner brushes, pipettes, hole punches, weaving materials, clay tools, printing blocks, textiles, recycled materials and simple musical instruments. Add artwork, photographs, music and cultural experiences as inspiration.	Offer a wide range of media, including clay, wire, textiles, junk materials, sketchbooks, palettes, pattern resources, percussion and tuned instruments where appropriate. Provide reference images and real experiences, while preserving choice and open-ended outcomes.	Challenge comes through choice, precision, combining media, experimenting with sound/movement, planning, revisiting and communicating ideas rather than producing a prescribed outcome.

Investigations and Problem Solving

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Natural objects, magnifiers, mirrors, magnets, simple scales, torches, containers, collections and cause/effect resources. Prioritise noticing, exploring, handling and talking about what children observe.	Add sorting trays, balance scales, magnets with varied objects, light/shadow materials, ramps, living things and simple recording options. Offer materials that invite children to compare, predict and test.	Provide varied apparatus for children to predict, test, compare and explain: rulers, tape measures, timers, scales, magnets, torches, mirrors, pulleys, ramps and natural specimens. Add simple tables, tally sheets, diagrams and child-selected investigation materials where useful.	Challenge comes from moving from noticing to predicting, testing, comparing, explaining, choosing resources and adapting an approach when it does not work.

Water exploration

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Cups, jugs, bottles, funnels, tubes, sponges, sieves and floating/sinking objects. Encourage pouring and transferring.	Add objects with different properties, boats, ramps, pipes, wheels, water wheels, droppers, pipettes, measuring jugs and balance scales.	Offer more complex water systems: connected pipes, channels, pumps, containers of different capacities, boats, waterproofing materials, timers and measuring tools. Provide opportunities to predict, test, modify and explain.	Challenge comes through flow, capacity, floating/sinking, force, waterproofing, prediction, measurement and system design.

Sand exploration

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Scoops, cups, containers, moulds, funnels, pipes, spades and natural loose parts. Prioritise filling, emptying, transporting and moulding.	Add varied containers, balance scales, measuring jugs, tubes, sieves, rakes, construction pieces and small-world figures. Introduce comparison and capacity language.	Provide graduated containers, measuring equipment, funnels/pipes, building materials, recipe cards, maps/plans and loose parts. Invite children to design channels, structures or measured quantities without requiring a single finished product.	Challenge comes through capacity, comparison, flow, construction, planning, measurement and solving problems when structures collapse or materials behave unexpectedly.

Construction

Pre-School→	Developing / transition→	Reception	Implicit challenge
Large wooden/foam blocks, simple interlocking bricks, boxes, tubes, chunky vehicles, animals, people and large loose parts.	Add smaller blocks, magnetic construction, planks, tubes/connectors, clips, elastic bands, wheels, axles and natural loose parts. Introduce photographs of real structures and encourage children to revisit models.	Provide varied construction systems, gears, wheels/axles, smaller components, junk modelling, tape, cable ties, split pins, rulers, photos/plans and maps. Include materials that require children to decide how to join and stabilise structures.	Challenge comes through stability, joining, scale, planning, combining materials, adapting designs and explaining choices.

3. Resource bank: useful additions and rotations

Open-ended / loose parts: Cardboard tubes and boxes; wooden discs; corks; fabric; ribbon; pegs; lolly sticks; stones; shells; pinecones; bottle tops; reels; wooden rings; baskets; trays; crates.

Real-life / authentic resources: Menus; takeaway containers; appointment cards; envelopes; receipts; catalogues; maps; measuring tapes; clipboards; old keyboards/phones; fabric bags; notebooks; calendars; tickets.

Joining / construction: Masking tape; paper tape; elastic bands; split pins; cable ties; string; pipe cleaners; connectors; clips; wheels and axles; magnetic tiles; nuts and bolts.

Precision / fine motor: Tweezers; pipettes; droppers; hole punches; lacing cards; beads; threading; pegs; mini tongs; nuts and bolts; locks and keys; scissors; paper fasteners.

Investigation: Magnifiers; mirrors; magnets; scales; torches; timers; rulers; tape measures; thermometers where appropriate; natural collections; ramps; pulleys; balance equipment.

Language, literacy & mark making: Story props; puppets; story stones; postcards; labels; signs; menus; lists; maps; catalogues; non-fiction books; poetry cards; blank books; envelopes; message pads.

Mathematical thinking: Loose parts for counting/pattern; dice; dominoes; ten frames; bead strings; number cards; timers; calendars; scales; measuring jugs; rulers; shape blocks; tangrams; construction pieces.

4. Principles for developing continuous provision

- **Start with children, not themes:** Use observations, interests, lived experiences and identified gaps to decide what to add, remove or reposition.
- **Fewer, better resources:** Avoid filling areas with large quantities of equipment. Select resources that have multiple possible uses and leave space for children to think.
- **Resource for progression, not decoration:** Every enhancement should have a reason: greater precision, more choice, a new possibility, a problem to solve or a new connection to make.
- **Keep challenge accessible:** Challenge should be discoverable rather than hidden behind adult instructions. Children should be able to enter at their own level and extend the play.
- **Rotate strategically:** Keep familiar core resources available while changing a small proportion to introduce novelty. Revisit resources so children can deepen understanding.
- **Use the environment as the third teacher:** Photographs, real objects, carefully arranged resources, accessible storage and visual prompts can communicate possibilities without constant adult direction.
- **Plan for transfer:** A resource introduced in one area can reappear elsewhere: clipboards in role play and outdoors; measuring tools in sand, water and construction; natural loose parts in maths, creative and small world.
- **Observe impact:** Ask whether children are using resources independently, sustaining play, solving problems, communicating ideas and making links. Adapt provision when it becomes repetitive or too adult-led.
- **Adapt rather than age-label:** The Pre-School/Reception progression is a guide, not a set of age restrictions. Children should have access to resources according to their development, interests and needs.

5. Adult interaction: extending without taking over

Use the provision first; use adult interaction to notice, model, comment, introduce vocabulary and deepen thinking. Useful prompts include:

- “I wonder what would happen if...”
- “How could you make it stronger / longer / fit / move?”
- “What could you use for that? Why?”
- “You tried that way. What else could you try?”
- “How do you know?”
- “Can you show me another way?”
- “What do you think will happen before we test it?”
- “Tell me about your plan.”
- “What could we change?”
- Model a new word naturally rather than turning play into a vocabulary test.

6. A simple review tool for staff

When reviewing an area, consider:

- Can children access the resources independently?

- Are there multiple possible uses or outcomes?
- Is there an appropriate entry point for less confident children?
- Is there a way for children who are ready to go further to increase complexity?
- Can children combine resources from other areas?
- Does the area encourage language, collaboration and sustained thinking?
- Is there authentic reason to read, write, count, measure or represent?
- Are resources rotated because they add a new possibility, rather than simply because the display needs changing?
- Are adults extending children's thinking without directing the play?
- Does observation show that the provision is resulting in deeper, more independent play?

7. Alignment and professional use

This document is designed to sit alongside our existing core-skills progression. It is deliberately not written as an objectives checklist. Development Matters describes broad pathways of development and emphasises that guidance should inform, not replace, professional judgement. The Early Learning Goals should be used for end-of-Reception assessment rather than as a curriculum. Provision should therefore remain responsive to individual children and should be adapted for SEND, language needs, prior experience and interests.

Reference points: Department for Education, Development Matters (updated September 2023); EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers (current from 1 September 2026); Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning.