

# MIRA

*Metacognition · Inner Life · Resilience · Agency*

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## Stage Guide

### Early Years · Ages 3–6

*Assessment system linked to the MIRA Model*

For Early Years teachers and stage coordinators · Guide body · Printable instruments are in the Annex of this document.

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# 1. The philosophy of assessment in the Early Years

Assessment in the Early Years within the MIRA model starts from a conviction shared by developmental research: at this age, assessing is not measuring — it is observing, documenting and accompanying. Children aged 3 to 6 learn through the body before the symbol, through play before study, and through exploration before response. Assessment must respect that way of learning, not force it.

In the Early Years there is no grading of any kind — neither numerical nor by level. The outcome of the process is always a teacher's narrative that shows the family what the child does, what they are building and what interests them. The purpose of the instruments is not to classify: it is to make learning visible so it can be accompanied.

*In the Early Years, assessment never points to what the child does not know. It only documents what the child already does and where they are heading. There is no equivalent of a "fail" or a negative mark: the whole stage is built on the idea of process, not outcome.*

## 1.1 The four MIRA conditions in the Early Years

The four conditions of the MIRA model are present from age 3, but they are expressed very differently from how they will appear in later stages. In the Early Years, Inner Life and Resilience are the leading conditions, in a concrete synergy: Resilience is built through Inner Life. Agency appears as a spark of initiative and Metacognition in an implicit form, always tied to play and concrete action.

| Condition | How it is expressed in the Early Years     | What the child does (age 3–6)                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>M</b>  | <b>Emerging Metacognition</b>              | Begins to notice what they are doing and what is hard for them. They do not yet reflect abstractly, but can answer orally to "what did you do?" and "what was hard?".                                             |
| <b>I</b>  | <b>Inner Life: the strongest condition</b> | Connects what they learn to what they like, what surprises them, or what frightens them. At this age, emotion and curiosity are the engine of learning. Condition I is more natural here than at any other stage. |
| <b>R</b>  | <b>Resilience tied to play</b>             | Persists when something does not work out (a tower that falls, a difficult line) and tries again. Error management happens in play, not in an assessed task.                                                      |
| <b>A</b>  | <b>Agency as initiative</b>                | Makes their own decisions in play and creation: choosing what to build, what to draw, how to solve a challenge. Agency here is initiative and exploration, not a finished product.                                |

## 1.2 Convergence of formative assessment × curriculum × MIRA in the Early Years

Competency-based curricula organise the Early Years into three areas of experience. The MIRA model does not replace them: it provides the logic for how to observe and document learning within them.

| Element                  | Curriculum (Early Years areas)                                                      | MIRA reading                                                    |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>What is assessed?</b> | Growth in harmony · Discovery of the environment · Communication and representation | The four M-I-R-A conditions observed through play and activity. |

|                                |                                                                 |                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>How?</b>                    | Direct, systematic observation of the process, not of outcomes. | Group observation record + pedagogical documentation (photo, output, the child's own words). |
| <b>Who assesses?</b>           | The teacher, with growing involvement from the child.           | The teacher observes; the child takes part with "Learning Hands" (early condition M).        |
| <b>How is it communicated?</b> | Qualitative report and conversations with the family.           | Adapted Progress Narrative + portfolio conversation with the family.                         |

## 2. Progression of instruments by year group

The four M-R-A conditions are observed across all three year groups, but the child's involvement in their own assessment grows from age 3 to age 5. The progression is designed so that the child moves from being observed to beginning to observe themselves, always through play and without any pressure of outcome.

| Year group   | Main instrument                                                                                    | Child's involvement (condition M)                                                                  | Milestone                                                               |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Age 3</b> | Systematic teacher observation with a group record (Emerging / In progress / Achieved).            | The child imitates the "Learning Hands" gesture. They do not yet self-assess.                      | —                                                                       |
| <b>Age 4</b> | Observation + start of the portfolio. The child chooses, with the teacher, which evidence to keep. | The child points to their hand ("I'm trying it" / "I can do it alone") with the teacher's support. | Portfolio presentation to the family (end of year).                     |
| <b>Age 5</b> | Observation + portfolio + Explorer's Questions (oral reflection).                                  | The child uses the hands independently and answers the four MIRA questions.                        | Age-5 Mini-Exhibition: 2 pieces of evidence, 5 minutes, family present. |

*The principle behind the progression: the same system grows with the child. At age 3 the teacher observes and the child imitates the gesture. At age 5 the child points alone, reflects orally and presents two pieces of evidence to their family. The instrument does not change: what changes is how much autonomy the child has within it. This is the same logic that continues in Primary with the star record and the rubric.*

## 3. Assessment instruments in the Early Years

### 3.1 Systematic observation

In the Early Years, observation is the central instrument and the only one that generates the report to the family. It does not happen apart from the activity: it happens while the child plays, explores and creates. The teacher uses a group record with the four A–D criteria on a process scale — Emerging / In progress / Achieved — which never includes a negative category.

| Criterion                | What the teacher observes                                                      | Typical evidence in the Early Years                                            |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A · Comprehension</b> | Whether the child explains in their own words and connects what they discover. | Spontaneous conversations, dictation to an adult, oral answers in circle time. |
| <b>B · Application</b>   | Whether the child uses what they have learnt in new play or task situations.   | Handling materials, constructions, solving concrete challenges.                |
| <b>C · Thinking</b>      | Whether the child asks their own questions or justifies their decisions.       | The Why Corner, reflection circle times, conversations during play.            |
| <b>D · Communication</b> | Whether the child expresses and communicates their ideas with growing clarity. | Oral presentations, artwork, explanations to classmates.                       |

### 3.2 "Learning Hands": self-assessment in the Early Years

"Learning Hands" is the instrument the child uses to begin looking at their own learning (condition M). It replaces the traffic-light system used in other approaches for a fundamental pedagogical reason: at ages 3–6 the colour red is inevitably associated with "bad" or "forbidden", and Early Years assessment cannot include any component the child might experience as failure.

The hand is the natural instrument of the Early Years child: with it they explore, build and create. It implies action and skill, and before action, it implies attention: looking and listening. The progression of the hand is cumulative and ascending — a capacity that is gained and kept — never a state one can "fall from".

| Gesture                                 | What the child says | What it means                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Hands as glasses (eyes and ears)</b> | "I look and listen" | Attention precedes action. The child attends to what is happening before starting to act. It is the first step of learning, not a lower level. |
| <b>One open hand</b>                    | "I'm trying it"     | The child tries, sometimes with help. Being here means being inside the learning, not outside it.                                              |
| <b>Two hands together</b>               | "I can do it alone" | The child manages without help and can teach it to someone else. The skill is consolidated.                                                    |

*The great advantage over the traffic-light system: the instrument is the child's own body, not a card. The child makes the gesture — hands as glasses, one hand up, two hands together. Self-assessment becomes a movement, not a mark on paper. The teacher uses the same gesture, so shared assessment is physical, immediate and free of negative connotation.*

### How it is used in each year group

| Year group | Who points | Levels used | Teacher support |
|------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|
|------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|

|              |                      |                               |                                |
|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Age 3</b> | The teacher observes | I look/listen + I'm trying it | The child imitates the gesture |
| <b>Age 4</b> | The child, with help | All three levels              | Oral question: did you try it? |
| <b>Age 5</b> | The child alone      | All three + drawing or word   | Closing conversation           |

### 3.3 The Explorer's Questions (age 4–5)

"Learning Hands" makes the level of skill visible. The Explorer's Questions make the whole process visible, activating the four MIRA conditions orally. They are not written down: the child answers by speaking, and the teacher records their words. They are used at the close of a game, project or meaningful activity.

| Condition | The question                                                       | What it activates in the child                                         |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>M</b>  | What did I learn today?                                            | Noticing what they have done. Early metacognition.                     |
| <b>I</b>  | Did this remind you of something that had already happened to you? | Connecting learning to their own lived experience. Inner Life.         |
| <b>R</b>  | What was hardest for me?                                           | Recognising difficulty without experiencing it as failure. Resilience. |
| <b>A</b>  | What did I do by myself?                                           | Recognising their own initiative and autonomy. Agency.                 |

### 3.4 The portfolio in the Early Years

The portfolio is the collection of evidence that shows the child's growth over the year. It is not a folder of everything they do: it is a selection made with intention. In the Early Years the portfolio is mostly visual — photographs, drawings, output — and the child's involvement grows from age 3 to age 5.

| Year group   | Who selects                                         | Format                              | MIRA function                                   |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Age 3</b> | The teacher, with the child's emerging involvement. | Visual: photos, drawings, output.   | I — connection with their learning.             |
| <b>Age 4</b> | The child chooses with the teacher's help.          | Visual + word dictated to an adult. | I + M — begins to know their own process.       |
| <b>Age 5</b> | The child selects with a simple reason.             | Visual + drawing + their own words. | M + I — direct bridge to the Primary portfolio. |

*The portfolio conversation — the child shows and explains a chosen piece of evidence to their family — is the complement to the written report and the direct forerunner of the Year 6 Exhibition in Primary.*

## 4. Stage milestone: the Age-5 Mini-Exhibition

The Age-5 Mini-Exhibition is the closing milestone of the Early Years. It is not an exam or a rehearsed performance: it is the moment when the child shows their family two pieces of evidence from their portfolio and explains, in their own words, why they chose them. It is the first time the child holds up their own learning before an audience, and the seed of the Year 6 Exhibition.

*Assessment: there is no grading of any kind. The Mini-Exhibition is neither passed nor failed. Its value lies in the child living the experience of choosing, showing and explaining. The only threshold is participation: that the child expresses, with whatever support they need, why they chose their evidence.*

| MIRA condition           | How it takes shape in the Mini-Exhibition                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>M — Metacognition</b> | The child chooses 2 pieces of evidence from their portfolio (with the teacher's help) and says why they like them or what they learnt from them. |
| <b>I — Inner Life</b>    | The child connects the evidence to something they already experienced before: what it reminds them of, what made them feel proud.                |
| <b>R — Resilience</b>    | If it arises naturally, the child tells what was hard and how they managed it. It is not forced: it is welcomed if it appears.                   |
| <b>A — Agency</b>        | A short oral presentation (about 5 minutes) to the family. The child chooses how to show their evidence. The initiative is theirs.               |

## 5. The family report in the Early Years

In the Early Years, the family report carries more weight than at any other stage, because families are in daily contact with the school and because, at this age, a child's development is parents' main concern. The report is always narrative: it describes what the child does, and never compares them to a standard or to other children.

| Component                     | What it contains                                                                                                     | Colour       |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>What they already do</b>   | Concrete evidence of what the child does with confidence. Specific description, never generic.                       | <b>Green</b> |
| <b>What they are building</b> | Skills that appear sometimes, with support, and are not yet consistent. The pattern is described, never the "error". | <b>Amber</b> |
| <b>Where we are heading</b>   | One single idea of what will be supported next term. Framed positively, in language accessible to families.          | <b>Blue</b>  |

### How to explain the system to families expecting a grade or a mark

Some families may feel uneasy about the absence of grading. The key message: narrative gives more information than any scale. A report saying "your child now dresses independently, is building the habit of taking turns to speak in circle time, and this term we will support their independence with toileting" communicates far more than any level or number. Families understand their child's development when they are told about it, not when they are scored.

## 6. Transition from the Early Years to Year 1

The move from the Early Years to Primary is a delicate one: the child arrives in Year 1 with habits of oral self-reflection and a portfolio already under way, and it is important that these tools do not disappear overnight. The continuity of the MIRA model eases this transition, because the self-assessment instrument evolves without breaking.

| What the child brings with them                                              | What changes in Year 1                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The "Learning Hands" gesture and the habit of pointing to their skill level. | The gesture gives way to the star record: the same concept (am I trying it / can I do it alone?) moves from hands to stars. The logic is identical; the format changes. |
| The portfolio begun in ages 4–5 with visual evidence.                        | The portfolio continues, now with a short piece of the child's own writing alongside the image.                                                                         |
| The habit of answering the Explorer's Questions (M·I·R·A, oral).             | The Explorer's Questions become the four MIRA questions on the pupil's star record, with the Reflection Card kept separate.                                             |
| The experience of the Mini-Exhibition before the family.                     | The first formal assessment appears in Year 3 (second cycle). In Years 1–2 there is still no written assessment.                                                        |

### The handover document

At the end of the Early Years, the teacher prepares a brief handover document for the Year 1 teacher. It is not a report of levels: for each child it records how they learn best (what motivates them, how they manage difficulty, how much autonomy they have) and a sample from the portfolio. The aim is for the Year 1 teacher to know the learner before assessing them.

## 7. The SAT in the Early Years

The Tutorial Support System (SAT) is the quality-assurance mechanism of the MIRA model. In the Early Years it operates on a radically different logic from Primary and Secondary: there are no competency assessments, so the SAT is not triggered by assessment results but by attentive observation of the child's development.

*In the Early Years the SAT does not assess performance: it watches over development. The alert signal is not "a percentage of the group fails an assessment", but "a child is showing signs that call for closer attention and, where appropriate, coordination with the family and the guidance team". The alert always aims to support early, never to label.*

### 7.1 Early-warning indicators in the Early Years

The indicators specific to this stage are developmental signals, not academic results. The teacher, who observes the child daily, is best placed to detect them:

- Absence: frequent absence at this age affects settling in, attachment and habits. A pattern of absence in the Early Years is always a signal to address with the family.
- Oral language development: a marked delay relative to what is expected for the age, or a regression, is the most important signal at this stage.
- Play and relationships: sustained isolation in play, persistent difficulty relating to others, or the absence of symbolic play when it would already be expected.
- Initiative and exploration: sustained lack of exploratory initiative, or marked distress in the face of everyday classroom challenges.

*None of these indicators is a diagnosis. They are signals to watch more closely and, if confirmed, to trigger the support protocol.*

### 7.2 Simplified support protocol (2 steps)

In the Early Years the SAT does not use the standard SAT Record used in Primary and Secondary (with percentage thresholds and assessment blocks). It uses a simplified two-step protocol, focused on observation and coordination.

| Step | Name                       | Responsible                      | Actions                                                                                                                                                           | Timeframe             |
|------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1    | <b>Focused observation</b> | Teacher / form tutor             | Record what is observed in the identified indicator for 2–3 weeks, with concrete examples. Distinguish the occasional from the persistent.                        | 2–3 weeks             |
| 2    | <b>Coordination</b>        | Teacher + family + guidance team | If the signal persists: a conversation with the family and referral to the school's guidance team. Agree on joint support and, if appropriate, external referral. | After the observation |

*When to escalate to external services: when observation and coordination with the family confirm a developmental signal that goes beyond the classroom (language, motor development, social relationships), the school refers to the educational and psycho-pedagogical guidance team or to early-intervention services, always with the family informed and in agreement. At this age, early detection is the most effective intervention.*

### 7.3 The role of the stage coordinator

The Early Years stage coordinator checks that systematic observation is carried out according to the agreed structure, that the support protocol is triggered when a signal persists, and that coordination with the family and the guidance team is documented. They do not intervene in the teacher's pedagogical relationship with the child: they oversee that the observation and support system is working.

## Annex 1 · Group observation record — Teacher's instrument

Early Years, ages 3–6 · One record per group · Process scale: Emerging / In progress / Achieved · Use during observation in play and activity

Group / Year / Term / Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

| Criterion                                        | Emerging                 | In progress              | Achieved                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A · Understands and explains in their own words  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B · Applies what they have learnt in play        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C · Asks questions and justifies their decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D · Expresses and communicates their ideas       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Notable observation about the group (with a concrete example):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Children requiring focused observation (Annex 3 · SAT protocol):  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Annex 2 · "Learning Hands" — Child's instrument

Early Years · The child points or makes the gesture · The teacher records what is observed · Use at the close of a game, activity or project

Child's name / Year group / Date / Activity: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

### Where are my hands today? (the child makes the gesture)

|                                                                 |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I look and listen (hands as glasses)   | I attend to what is happening before I start.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm trying it (one open hand)          | I try it, sometimes with help.                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can do it alone (two hands together) | I can do it without help and can show someone else. |

### The Explorer's Questions (Ages 4–5 · the child answers by speaking)

M · What did I learn today?  
\_\_\_\_\_

I · Did this remind you of something that had already happened to you?

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R · What was hardest for me?

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A · What did I do by myself?

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*The teacher records the child's words just as they say them. These answers are not graded: they are the first form of metacognition, and the origin of the four MIRA questions and the Reflection Card in Primary.*

*MIRA · Stage Guide: Early Years · Version 1.0 · Pilot School Network*

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