



# Ofsted Inspections

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# How to be 'outstanding'

**A**s extraordinary as it seems, only three per cent of all settings throughout England and Wales, including childminders and childcare in domestic premises, are awarded 'outstanding' in all areas.

This is not a status that is given out frivolously. Settings must prove beyond doubt that the level and care and education that they provide not only meets the EYFS requirements and guidance, but exceeds them above and beyond. 'Outstanding' settings will demonstrate that the children in their care relish their time at the setting, and are being supported in embracing, achieving and superseding the aims of five outcomes contained within the *Every Child Matters* document.

## Passionate professionals

In 'outstanding' settings, passion and enthusiasm runs through the very heart and soul of all practitioners. Home carers and childminders will often go the extra mile to ensure that the children in their care receive nothing less than the very best care and education. Children flourish and relish their time in the setting and are encouraged to explore and develop their interests.

'Outstanding' childcare professionals are devoted to their chosen vocation and are committed to providing children and their families with a first class service. For these professionals, the job is not about profit or financial rewards but about passion, love and the desire to enthuse children in their learning.

## What the best settings provide

At the hub of an 'outstanding' setting are the children and their families – they are what makes the heart of the setting beat. Children are actively encouraged to develop positive ways of thinking; to

form strong and trusting relationships, as well foster a genuine respect for others. Children are appreciated, listened to and are treated with respect and consideration at all times. Practitioners engage in sustained shared thinking with the children as they develop new lines of enquiry and interest.

'Outstanding' practitioners provide children with opportunities and resources to continue to reach their full potential (which continually changes with age and development); they are enthusiastically encouraged to take a significant role in determining their own activities, as well as developing their own positive interests as practitioners afford them with the necessary and appropriate resources to do so.

Further to this, 'outstanding' practitioners have an exceptional understanding and unprecedented awareness of each individual child's interests and abilities, and regularly monitor and observe them throughout the day. Practitioners will then share and discuss this information with parents and guardians in order to agree on 'next steps' or possible lines of development. Children are fully included in 'next steps' planning, and this can be achieved by asking the child to articulate their thoughts and ideas – either verbally or by drawing or painting them.

All measures are taken in order to ensure that children are fully involved in the development of their own learning, whatever their age. After all, it is all about them!

## Parents as partners

'Outstanding' practitioners recognise that parents and guardians are 'first and foremost' a child's most 'enduring educator' (EYFS Resources: Working with Parents) and they continually work alongside them. It is, therefore, essential

that parents and guardians, are considered part of the team. You must ensure that you maintain excellent liaison with parents and guardians as this is vital to building a trusting relationship, as well as enhancing outcomes for the children in your care.

As part of the holistic approach to learning and development, 'outstanding' early years practitioners encourage the two-way flow of information/observation, so that children's interests, activities and milestones can be captured at home (by the parents), outdoors, and within the remit of the setting. This method allows an overall picture to emerge of a child's current interest in all environments.

Different and innovative strategies are used by practitioners in order to capture this very important reciprocal exchange of information, and, as a consequence, they are used to create personalised planning.

As a home carer or childminder, there are many ways in which you could strengthen your partnership with parents and extend your practice to fully include parents in their child's learning and development process. For example, you could provide opportunities for parents to involve themselves in your setting by engaging them in messy play activities, story time, cooking sessions, or by asking them to volunteer in your setting.

Drawing on a parents' own expertise – whether that be languages, football, ICT or singing – provides the children with specialised learning. This not only enhances their educational journey, but enables parents to play an active and full role in that journey.

## Safeguarding

Rigorous and effective safeguarding policies and procedures should be in place, with home carers and childminders fully aware of their role in keeping children safe from harm. 'Outstanding' practitioners know exactly who to contact when a

possible safeguarding case arises. They have an in depth knowledge of the steps that they need to take when contacting their Local Safeguarding Children Board, and endeavour to ensure that all relevant information is passed on to the correct individuals. Safeguarding children is paramount to their practice.

## Reflective practitioner

One of the most significant factors in becoming an 'outstanding' childcare provider is the ability to reflect on and evaluate your own current practice.

Regularly reviewing and identifying areas of strength and development ensures that the children are receiving the highest quality of care and education. This is because a reflective practitioner continually aspires to be the best they can by keeping up-to-date with current practice, trying out new initiatives and taking a critical and

## Top tips

- Ensure that children are at the heart of everything that you do.
- Work in full cooperation and collaboration with parents in order to strengthen relationships.
- Capture a child's interests, not only when they are in your setting, but also when they are at home.
- Involve children and parents in the child's individual planning process.
- Regularly update and review your own practice (at least every 12 weeks).
- Join and regularly participate in a childminding network or early years forum in your area.
- Continue to improve your own professional development by signing up for courses or undertaking Early Years Professional Status (EYPS).
- Above all, continue to be passionate about children and their learning!

innovative approach to new ideas and concepts.

'Outstanding' practitioners do this automatically and without prompt in order to make a positive difference to children and their families. For those of you that do not, as yet, have your own method of reflecting, Ofsted has provided

the online reflective self-evaluation tool (SEF). Although not mandatory to use, it is an excellent tool which will allow you to capture, record, and measure just how effective your setting is in providing the very best care that children deserve.

*Maria Marraffa Hudson, early years professional*

**Reflective practice is essential if we are to move forward, develop our provision and improve outcomes for children. What does being reflective mean, and how can we work to be reflective practitioners?**

# Reflective practice



**W**e hear a great deal about the importance of being a reflective practitioner, and it is essential if we are to continue to develop our practice and provision and improve outcomes for children. What exactly does being a reflective practitioner mean and how can we ensure that we are reflective?

A reflective practitioner is one who has the ability to think about and analyse their actions with the aim of developing and improving their practice. A reflective practitioner is someone who is aware of their strengths and skills, but is also aware of their limitations and aspects of practice that could be developed.

We are actually reflecting all the time, thinking about what the children have done and what we have done, mostly without realising it. If we can make the move from doing this to reflecting in a more conscious way, we are part of the way to being a reflective practitioner.

In many ways it is more difficult for a childminder to be reflective than it is for a practitioner in a group setting, who will often be encouraged to be reflective and involved in reflection as part of a team. A childminder has to be very disciplined and self-aware to reflect effectively.

Reflective practice is about thinking about what you say you do and how this compares to what you actually do and the level or the degree to which you do it. So, basically, could you do it better, could you do it differently, could it be improved upon? To be able to do this effectively you have to be honest with yourself, as well as being motivated to want to seek continuous improvement.

## The benefits

Let us consider the benefits of reflective practice before we think about practicalities. So why should we bother to reflect – what are the benefits for the childminder?

- You become more motivated.
- Skills can be developed, especially if training is attended to support this development.
- You get greater job satisfaction, you feel you are doing your best and making a difference.
- You become more confident about your knowledge, skills and job role.
- You become an agent of change working to support children to achieve better outcomes.

There are also benefits for the children:

- Their individual needs are more likely to be met.
- The childminder will have a greater understanding of how to support their development.
- They will have a greater sense of well-being in the setting.

Ultimately, you are aiming for the best possible practice as a childminder and striving to develop better outcomes for children. It is about aspirations – both for you and the children. If you are aspiring to be the best, the opportunities and experiences you offer the children will be of greater benefit, as your knowledge and understanding of them and your provision increases. This then has a knock-on effect in relation to the children's learning and development.

## How do I reflect?

You are reflecting each day in the daily diaries you keep for the children, when you chat to parents, through planning, through observations and when you react and respond to a child in their play. Your self-evaluation form (SEF) is also a tool for reflective practice – you are reflecting when you review your policies, but you need to work to embed reflection as part of your general good practice.

To reflect, you question the way you do something: Why do I do it this way? Is it appropriate? Where did the idea come from? Was it from someone else or did it just evolve? You then think about alternative ways of doing something, which may or may not be practical – but it is about keeping as open a mind as possible, and you might be surprised.

View things from a different perspective: this could be the children's, the parents', or maybe even your family's. It will help your perception of the situation and how it appears to, or is experienced, by others – which can be a real eye-opener.

Think about the consequences, if you did try to do something in a different way, what might the impact be, both positive and negative. This needs to be followed by a trial run for your ideas of doing something differently, so you can analyse the success and impact. Following this, you may need to tweak your ideas.

This process might just take place in your head, or you could discuss it with other childminders to gain greater insight and further ideas. You may also wish to record your reflection, writing down the process and completing an action plan. Always refer to any changes as a result of reflective practice, in your SEF.

## Where to start?

The best place to start is simply with yourself. Consider the following questions:

- How do I see my role?
- What are my key skills and strengths?
- Are there aspects of my practice where I feel less confident?

Then think about your relationship and knowledge of one your minded children and consider the following:

- How much time do you spend listening to and talking to the child?
- What are the child's main likes and interests?

- How do you use these to help the child learn?

These questions may all seem very simple and straightforward, but if thought about honestly can bring about an interesting insight.

The questions which relate to your knowledge of a child, could be, and perhaps should be, used for each child, so you can then see how your knowledge of different children varies, alongside your ability to effectively support their learning and development.

It can also be helpful to try to answer questions from a child's perspective, relating to their experience of the setting. How do you think they would answer? Consider the following:

- Do I feel I belong or am I just part of the crowd?
- Am I usually glad to be here, rather than eager to leave?
- Am I spoken to seriously and by name, rather than someone who is 'precious' or 'cute'?
- Do I usually feel welcome rather than captured?
- Do I usually feel accepted, understood and protected?
- Do I find most activities engaging, absorbing and challenging and not just entertaining?
- Do I find most experiences meaningful and in an appropriate context, rather than just frivolous or boring?
- Do I find most of the experiences satisfying rather than frustrating or confusing?

These questions can pose quite a challenge, but at the same time can be very thought-provoking.

## What should I reflect on?

Anything and everything: it might be something major, for example, reviewing with a view to developing your outdoor environment. You might reflect on how you support children's emotional well-being, or simply lunchtime.

Let's take, as an example, the end of the day as an aspect of practice to reflect upon, a time of day which can often be tricky. Answer these questions as fully as you can and see if you can make this time of day better for everyone.

- Do you know what time the parents are going to arrive?
- Are the children ready for when their parents arrive, belongings collected together, shoes on, etc?
- Who takes responsibility for the children's behaviour at this time? Is it clear to all concerned who has that responsibility? Do you still enforce the same boundaries?
- Do you have a set routine for when the parents arrive?
- How do you ensure the child's emotional well-being at this time, especially if a parent is late? How do you achieve this consistently?
- Are there aspects of this time of the day that you find difficult?

It might take a while to answer a set of questions like this, as they have to be posed first – and then you may have to go through the experience again a few times before you can effectively reflect on the questions and actively improve the situation.

Once you get used to the process of reflecting on aspects of practice, it becomes much easier. Start with something you are fairly confident with and then move towards those areas you feel less confident about. Don't be afraid to talk to others and seek help, perhaps from a childminding development worker, network coordinator, or other childminders. Although the actual reflection is a solitary task, don't feel you have to struggle alone to work out how to move forward.

As with anything, once your confidence builds and reflection becomes embedded, you will soon be able to see and feel the benefits.

*Jenny Barber, early years trainer and consultant*

Two leading early years trainers explain why the Self-evaluation form (SEF) can make your life easier, and offer some top tips for completing it.



Professional  
development

# The SEF in practice

So, why is there now so much emphasis on the SEF? Research has proven that self-reflection and evaluation both support good practice within a setting as part of continual development. Importantly, this self-reflection supports good outcomes for children.

The EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) project was very influential in informing us of the significance of self-reflection and evaluation.

'The use of self-evaluation [...] should enable settings to reflect on their current strengths and identify next steps which will have a direct impact on children's learning experiences.'

In their efforts to continually improve outcomes for children, Ofsted decided to implement a specific early years self-evaluation tool.

Although the completion of the SEF is not compulsory, all settings are advised to complete the form. Both completion of the form and failure to complete the form can have a very significant effect on the outcome of your inspection.

If you do complete your SEF, it is likely to decrease the length of the inspection and helps the inspector to know what to focus on in the inspection. If completed properly the SEF can ease the process of inspecting for the inspector.

If you do not complete your SEF, you will more than likely be asked about it and will need a good reason as to why it has not been completed.

Failure to complete the form could also mean that your inspection will be longer and more searching. The self-evaluation criteria is likely to be graded lower, although the inspector will check to see what other methods of self-evaluation have been implemented.

Before tackling the SEF, it is worth spending some time reflecting on your setting and its current self-assessment strategies. Settings where reflective practice occurs regularly will find completion of the SEF a much easier task.

Childminders, managers and leaders in settings need to consider what is already being done in the setting to evaluate quality and practice, and how good practice is shared throughout the setting.

The basic key questions of self-evaluation are:

- How are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What are we going to do now?

Involving anyone who works with you in the process of self-evaluation will produce higher standards and a sense of ownership over the process of continual development. It is worth remembering that self-evaluation only works where individuals within a setting are committed to ensuring high standards and are able to look objectively at practice.

All practitioners need to be aware of what the priorities for improvement are as identified in the SEF, and their role in the ongoing process of working towards improvement. As the SEF is a working document which plays an important role in the development of the setting, bear in mind that Ofsted will look to validate the statements in your SEF by questioning everyone who works in the setting, whether they are new-starters or not.

It is essential then that the setting's SEF is included in the induction process so that all new members of staff are aware of how the setting sees itself.

Using reflective practice as part of your self-assessment process within the setting will greatly help and support completion of the form. When you first look at the SEF it may look a daunting task to complete it, but breaking it down section by section and setting yourself small completion steps can make it seem much more manageable.

## What you need to know Practicalities

- The SEF can be completed online and Ofsted recommends that you use this method.
- You can update your SEF online as often as you like, probably every three or four months, but it should be updated no less than once a year.
- An annually updated hard copy needs to be sent to Ofsted.
- You need a copy of the SEF in the setting at all times ready for the inspector.
- To complete the online form you will need an Ofsted Security Token (OST), which is a unique password, and the guidelines on how to complete the online form. If you have not received an OST you need to contact Ofsted (08456 40 40 43), quoting your Unique Reference Number.

## Hint

Around two days before your inspection, your online SEF will most

## Case study

A leader in a setting commented that the first time she and her staff completed the SEF it was a very lengthy and time-consuming process. She acknowledged though that once the form had been filled out first time round, it would never take so long again to modify and update.

Leader of a pre-school setting

Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

likely be frozen. This will give you a warning that the inspector is on their way!

### Tips for completing the SEF

- Start with the section you find easiest to complete to give yourself a boost, then progress gradually to completing all of the form.
- Make your statements clear and concise and add evidence to back up your statements e.g. refer to policies, planning, observations, records etc., and have these to hand for the inspector to review.
- Use bullet points rather than lengthy paragraphs.
- Try to convey as full a picture as possible of your setting.
- Use a dictionary if you are unsure of a correct spelling. To use a spell-check you will need to cut and paste into a word document, as there is no spell-check with the online form.
- Ensure you use appropriate terminology and language and avoid jargon and slang.
- Use the Ofsted guidance notes.
- Even though inclusion will be graded separately, it is important to re-inforce it throughout the whole SEF.



### Case study

A group of practitioners from different settings were discussing the SEF. One practitioner said she felt that by completing the SEF they were being asked to do Ofsted's job for them. Another practitioner disagreed, saying she felt the SEF gave her an opportunity to show everything that was done well in her setting, and take a sense of pride in good practice and achievements. This was supported by another practitioner, who stated that Ofsted only gain a snapshot of a setting during an inspection, but the SEF gives them a much broader and fuller picture of the setting as a whole.

Practitioners from a mixture of settings

### How to grade yourself

- Be honest, if you feel your provision and/or practice in a specific area is outstanding say so and why.
- Even if you grade yourself as 'outstanding', you still need to identify areas for improvement and what you are hoping to do to make it even better.
- Ofsted will look at how their judgment compares to yours and in doing so will be evaluating your judgements and ability to self-evaluate.

The form is broken down into three parts:

#### Part A

This part covers the setting details and views of those who use the setting. It details the characteristics of your setting and the background of the children. It also asks you to seek the views of all those who use your setting and how you use these views to improve the quality of the provision.

#### Part B

Evaluation of the outcomes for children. This should help you think about and assess your provision. You should answer the questions by taking account of the welfare, learning and development requirements and statutory guidance set out in the EYFS framework.

You should think carefully about any changes and improvements you have made since your most recent inspection. In the text boxes you should describe briefly what you think is

working best and describe any plans you have to further improve provision.

Tell Ofsted about any evidence you have that supports what you are saying, for example photographs, documents, risk assessment. These should then be available for the inspector when they visit.

### Part C

This is where you supply information about how you meet the statutory requirements of the EYFS framework and where you can state if you are registered on either or both parts of the Childcare Register.

Jenny Barber and Sharon Paul-Smith.

Based on the EYFS Inspection in Practice (ISBN: 9781904575856). Order the latest edition with updated information on the changes to the SEF from Practical Pre-school Books ([www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com](http://www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com), 0207 501 6753).

### Case study

I had set a target to complete my SEF by the end of the month, but my inspection happened before then. I had completed about three quarters of my SEF, as I had run out of time. To complete my SEF I re-read my policies and reflected on my practice and implementation of the EYFS.

The inspector stayed with me for four hours and said she would not have been here so long if my SEF had been fully completed. The inspector was lovely and very friendly. I was asked many questions and there was some cross-questioning to build up a picture of how I was meeting the EYFS. Despite being apprehensive, I felt prepared for the inspection and was pleased with the outcome.

Sarah Cann, childminder, Buckinghamshire

# Inspection Day! Creating a good first impression

**A**s we all know first impressions really do count, we are genetically programmed in a way that means they have to. This is true even for your Ofsted inspector.

Of course, inspectors are professional people who aren't going to be fooled by the veneer of everything on the surface looking good but the practice being poor, and they aren't going to make judgements solely based on their first impressions – they are professionally far more objective than that. Nevertheless, the first impression does influence opinion and can change the feel of a visit.

The following statement is taken directly from an Ofsted report: 'It is obvious from the moment the doors open and the children rush in that this is a happy and lively place where learning is fun.'

Before they arrive the inspector will have used their intuition to gauge what their expectations are and what they are going to find, from reading your completed Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). This article aims to explore first impressions and how we can ensure that they are favourable in getting a true impression and judgement of your setting.

## The arrival

Hopefully the Ofsted inspector will have arrived at your door safely, having been informed of how to gain access to your house. On the walk from the car or train to the door of your setting they are going to be looking around to see if the setting is inviting and welcoming.

They are going to ring on your doorbell and, when admitted, may have to wait for a few minutes if it is not you

who answers the door, or you are talking with parents. This can be an illuminating experience and one you should try yourself to give a true reflection of what it is going to be like for an inspector.

Ask yourself the questions: is the first room they will see warm, welcoming and comfortable? Is it worth providing somewhere for parents and carers to sit? Does everyone in your setting feel at ease and welcome? Are any information and notices given in an accessible manner to everyone, including those with additional needs?

My experiences of waiting as a mother or as a visitor to a setting have not always been positive and a bad initial impression can colour my view of that setting. As a visitor I often just stand and listen and wonder what it would be like to be a parent or child in that setting, especially a new parent – do I feel that I belong? Or is it a bit cliquy?

If parents are present, are they exchanging information which is sensitive and that really shouldn't be aired in public? Are they chatting about the setting in a positive and encouraging manner? Am I spoken to or am I ignored? Is there something for me to do while I wait or something informative for me to read? Whatever area you have designated for people to wait in, make sure it reflects the rest of the setting.

It leaves a bad impression if the inspector has to ask for the book to sign in, so when they arrive remember to ask them to sign in the visitors' book. The visitors' book must have a column for the name, date, time in and out and purpose of visit. Also, don't forget to tell the inspector about your emergency procedures.

## The greeting

This can be a tricky one! You are about to be inspected – you are bound to be anxious and possibly more than a little tense, but try to relax, breathe deeply, be friendly and above all be professional!

Introduce the inspector to any other childminders or childminding assistants, or parents who are present. Show them where they can put their bag and coat and where the toilet is.

## A positive setting

If you work with other childminders, try to ensure that the dynamics of your team remain professional on inspection day. To witness the team working together in a friendly manner with good rapport will prove to the inspector that you work well together and will be supportive as a team during challenging times.

Indicators of good teamwork are shared goals, respect and friendliness to one another. This is not about being matey it is about being professional and sincere in your approach to your work. The inspector will be experienced in what effective teamwork looks like. Below are some indicators of a positive setting.

- Does the room appear organised?
- If you work with others are all the childminders communicating verbally, is there also evidence of non-verbal communication, for example message books?
- Are the children happy and on task, and are their physical needs being met?
- Is there a happy and positive atmosphere?
- Are the displays up-to-date?
- Is the routine displayed and followed?

- Do the children respond to the adults?
- Do the adults respond to the children?

Your approach to the children in the setting must also reflect normality – try to be the same with the children as you always are, any tension that you are feeling will rub off on them. It is so easy to detect false behaviour – the children will be the first to see through it!

You are not going to get an inadequate judgement if on the day the inspector comes three children are crying, Jonnie and Alice have just bitten each other and the fish has died. Unless of course you leave the three children uncomforted, you don't help Jonnie and Alice to resolve their dispute amicably and you leave the fish floating in the bowl! It is how you handle the situations you are faced with that count, as well as what caused them in the first place.

Could reflective practice have identified areas for improvement that would negate these problems? For example, have observations revealed that children are unsettled on arrival and have you thought about (and discussed if you work with others) ways to improve this situation, for example by moving straight into free-flow play at the beginning of a session.

If you work with other childminders, is important that everyone working in the setting is identifiable. A named photograph of each childminder working in your setting with their level of training is a nice touch. Not only does being identifiable help everyone know who everyone else is, it also demonstrates a sense of pride in your place of work.

Once the inspector has walked in the door and been greeted and signed in, they will no doubt pause and look around the room to get a feel for the place, to get an idea of the general ambiance: this is another chance to make a positive first impression. They will want to see a bright, airy and clean room. That doesn't mean there is no paint or water or sand or glitter – those

## Inspection case study

As a visitor to many settings I recently visited a fairly new purpose-built setting where all the equipment was expensive and pristine, staff were well-qualified and children were from affluent homes – and I thought this is going to be just great.

The next day I visited a setting in a village hall where everything had to be got out and put away every day – this was absolutely everything. I arrived a while before opening when nothing was quite ready and to be honest it all looked a bit shabby – two wheels on the craft trolley where there should have been four!

However, the comparison of practice between the two settings was vast, with the shabbier one coming out by far the best. I commented about this in a very general way to a friend who asked a very important and profound question: what is it that makes the difference?

My response was spontaneous, I didn't have to consider it at all – it is simply the adult responses to children. In the village hall setting the children were listened to, encouraged, there was a great deal of sustained shared thinking and great teamwork, and not a single member of staff lacked enthusiasm and commitment.

Early years advisor

things are meant to be there. It means that there aren't five year-old cobwebs and displays of children's work that are so old the paper is curled and the season has passed.

*‘Your approach to the children must reflect normality, any tension you are feeling will rub off on them’*

We all have our own ideas about what is important to us, and the Ofsted inspector is no different: there will be something that they are extra keen on to look at first. However, during the course of the visit they will look at most things. Some of the things that leave a lasting impression from first glance are listed on the check list at the end of the article.

## Putting it to the test

A good way to know what first impression your setting may give is to try to experience it yourself, or visit other settings to see how their practice is similar or varies from yours. This will help

you to identify your own strengths and weaknesses and see where improvements can be made. You could set up a video to record the beginning of your sessions, or simply video around the setting – it is amazing what you will see through this.

Alternatively, get a fresh pair of eyes in to look for you. It might be worth asking your local early years team if they could evaluate some areas for you, to provide reassurance. You should network with other local settings, as you may get ideas that you could use. Peer observations with feedback and evaluation will help you to identify areas of strength, both individually and as a team, and identify those areas that require development.

As stated at the beginning of the article, we all know that first impressions count – but they can be misguided. I'm sure we have all formed impressions in the past only to be proven wrong, so it doesn't all hang on first impressions. Good practice is more important and this will become evident during the visit. Nevertheless, if things start off badly and the inspector's view is tainted it can prove to be a long haul to get things back on track.

Jenny Baber and Sharon Paul-Smith  
Adapted from *The EYFS Inspection in Practice* (Practical Pre-School Books, 2009), [www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com](http://www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com)

# First impressions checklist

What the inspectors may look for	Comment	Yes	Partly	No
Is there a variety of age or stage appropriate activities available?	Are you sure activities suit all children, e.g. no small parts?			
Are activities set out on different levels?	Are there table-top, floor, wall activities?			
Do activities encourage exploration & investigation?	Do adults model exploration & investigation?			
Are resources up-to-date & relevant?	Children need activities relevant to their lives			
Are all resources fit for purpose?	All puzzle pieces present, no wood splinters, all pages in books			
Is the paint fresh?	Is paint stirred and refreshed daily – are there plenty of colours?			
Is the playdough fresh?	Do the children make the playdough themselves, is there a choice of colour, texture and tools, etc?			
Can children initiate their own play through free choice?	This will be apparent immediately			
Are resources clearly labelled with words & pictures?	Children first learn to read through looking at pictures & identifying symbols & making representations			
Are all the adults interacting and engaging with the children?	This can include observing the children			
Is there a clear learning intention to each activity?	Would every adult present know what this is?			
Are the activities provided exciting?	Ask: 'Would I want to play here if I was a child?'			
Do the children appear to be happy and engaged?	If children are bored they can become frustrated			
Are there displays of children's work: are these clearly labelled, perhaps with a child's photo?	Is every child's work included? Are these up-to-date? Is all the work displayed the children's own?			
Are displays child height?	Are they bright & colourful			
Would all children feel they belong here?	Does each child have their own peg, tray, etc?			
If English was not my first language, could I access information?	Consider how you ensure messages are received & understood			
Is there a visual timetable?	This helps children with routines & transitions			
Is there access to plenty of malleable materials?	There should be around five malleable activities available			
Do children know who their key person is?	Have you got key person lists with photos of the key persons?			
Are areas of learning easily identifiable?	Do children and adults know where to go to do each activity?			
Does the setting smell fresh?	No stale food smells, etc			
Do children have free access to drinking water?	Ideally, free-flowing water, but be sure it is fresh daily			

What the inspectors may look for	Comment	Yes	Partly	No
Are the toilets well stocked with soap, handtowels and toilet paper?	It is best practice to use squeezable bottle soap, not bars			
Is there access to natural materials?	It is good to have natural resources both indoors & outdoors			
Are all cultures equally reflected?	This is especially important where some cultures are not physically present			
Is there free-flow play indoors and outdoors?	Are staff actively encouraging free-flow play?			
Is the statutory paperwork displayed?	E.g. insurance certificate, Ofsted registration, etc			
Is there evidence that the setting is taking part in a Q.A scheme?	If you are taking part, display any certificates & show inspectors			
Would I know what to do in case of an emergency in this setting?	Remember to tell every visitor your emergency plan when they arrive			
If you work in a team, are first-aiders identified?	Is there a notice displayed with the first-aiders' names?			
Is there clear evidence of a strong partnership with parents?	This will be evident in the rapport between parents and staff			




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 Children's Workforce  
 Development Council

# Look out – it's a box day!

'Knock knock, ding ding'. As you reluctantly head for the door, your heart begins to pound uncontrollably, and suddenly the sheer realisation that your inspection process is about to commence, sets in.

Feeling anxious and uneasy, you slowly unlock the door and are greeted by a stranger with a beaming smile, flashing their Ofsted identification badge at you. You momentarily freeze before remembering to reach over for that all important visitors' signing in book. The children are at your feet wondering why you are flapping about like a fallen pigeon, and you explain to them that today is an extra special day – maybe even a 'box day'. And so it begins...

This may seem all too familiar for some of you, and for those of you still waiting for your first inspection, the process itself does not have to be distressing. In fact quite the opposite, the inspection process is your opportunity to shine, to show the inspector just what you and the children do on a daily basis. It is a chance to blow your trumpet and reveal to all why you are exceptional at your job!

## Prepare yourself

Nobody can tell you exactly how your day will flow, as this largely depends on the events of the day itself, the mood of the children, as well as whether or not you are adequately prepared.

The significant factor here is, indeed, preparation, as this is the key to having a relatively stress-free inspection. Remember, it is not how brilliantly or how badly the day flows, but the way in which you respond to any special events or awkward or difficult situations that arise: you are being judged on your ability to handle such situations.

Being sufficiently prepared for your inspection will help to alleviate your stress levels. It will also enable you



to minimise the time spent with the inspector searching for requested EYFS files and documentation. With more time on your hands, you can continue to engage in what you do best – and that is caring for, and extending the learning and development of, the children in your care.

Before the inspector arrives, ensure that you have all relevant documents clearly labelled and laid out on a table. This will save time and allow for a smoother process. Ensure that your policies, procedures, self-evaluation form (SEF), certificate, and professional development portfolio, as well as all EYFS-related documentation, are updated and easily accessible.

Provide the inspector with samples of children's work and ensure that you have permission from parents to showcase their child's learning journey, as well as their progress summaries. Just in case you forget to tell your inspector something on the day, ensure that your SEF includes everything that you want them to know about (i.e. highlight all the courses you have completed, awards achieved, policies updated, input from parents, outings and visits).

Forward planning really does pay off, and while your inspector is eagerly reading through all your childcare achievements and documentation, you can continue your daily routines and activities with the children.

## 'Children, it's a box day!'

On the day of your inspection, continue to allow yourself to flow with the interests of the children and ensure that their favourite activity or resource is immediately accessible to them at all times. Remember that it is essential not to disrupt the daily routine of the children too much; your Ofsted inspector will fit into your day – not the other way around!

In the event that you find yourself becoming fraught and in fear of 'losing the plot' it may be helpful for you and your children to create a special activity box, which you can bring out at any given moment. The box can be as imaginative as you and the children want it to be, the wackier and more interesting the better.

You can create a box of activities and games that you and the children only play on very special occasions, (birthdays, festivals, Ofsted visits), therefore placing special significance on the box itself. Each time the box (the contents should be rotated in order to keep the element of surprise) is explored, the children will feel privileged and excited to use it and will eagerly look forward to the next time it is used.

This box truly captures the attention of children and is an ideal resource to bring out when situations feel as if they are becoming uncontrollable, especially during an inspection.

## Blow your own trumpet

The inspectors are in your setting for a small amount of time and this is your chance to relish the process and see it as an ideal opportunity to sell yourself and shine. Don't be modest, take a deep breath, and blow that trumpet!

*Maria Marraffa Hudson, early years professional*

Since September 2010, Ofsted has no longer been inspecting early years settings directly. [Child Care](#) asked Ofsted to answer a few of your questions.

# Outsourcing inspections: What you need to know



Last September the day-to-day inspection and registration visits of early years providers were transferred to Tribal Group Plc and Prospects Services Ltd. These changes were made to enable Ofsted to focus on the quality of provision in the early years sector. But those experiencing inspections shouldn't be concerned, as they are unlikely to see any significant differences in the way inspections and registrations are carried out.

Ofsted has a history of successfully working with a number of companies in the private sector, to provide high-quality inspections for schools.

Transferring staff who have good expertise and strong knowledge of early years, will ensure that inspections and registration visits continue to be carried out by qualified and experienced inspectors. Often the same staff that conducted inspections for Ofsted before the changes will still inspect early years provision under the new arrangements.

Early years inspection and regulation are important parts of Ofsted's work, and by outsourcing parts of this work we are sharpening our focus on making improvements, to create a better service for children. These changes will bring greater value for money, giving Ofsted the ability to work in a more flexible way, while maintaining high standards of inspection.

Over time, the outsourcing of day-to-day management of inspection will create opportunities for strong early years practitioners to train to inspect and to

work closely with experienced inspectors and share good practice.

Ofsted is still the main point of contact for general enquiries about registration, inspection, compliance, enforcement, complaints, fees and all other enquiries relating to early years.

## Inspections

Ofsted is working closely with Tribal and Prospects to carry out early years inspection services. Tribal and Prospects are working on behalf of Ofsted and are carrying out their work in Ofsted's name.

Ofsted will continue to decide who needs to be inspected and when the inspection takes place, and then Prospects and Tribal will arrange for inspectors to carry out those inspections. The inspector's report will be sent to providers to check that it is factually accurate, and then it will be submitted to Ofsted to be placed on the website.

There may be times when provision is judged to be 'inadequate' and, depending on the nature and seriousness of the concerns, Ofsted may decide to send a senior Ofsted inspector (either an HMI or a regulatory inspector) to monitor the provision until it has improved. In most other cases, Tribal or Prospects will send an inspector to check that improvements have been made.

So that we can continue to improve the quality of inspections, providers are encouraged to feedback their views of the quality of the inspection that Tribal or Prospects provides. This can be done online and views will remain anonymous.

## Registration

Those who wish to apply to be on the early years or childcare registers will

continue to find the information they need on the Ofsted website at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Applicants should also seek advice, guidance and support from their local authority before completing the application form.

Once the application has been received by us and the checks carried out, those who apply to be on the early years register will be contacted by someone from Tribal or Prospects to arrange a pre-registration visit.

The visit will be carried out by a fully qualified inspector, who will check the premises and interview the applicant. The inspector will not confirm registration at that stage, but will submit a report to Ofsted where all of the information available will be considered. Ofsted will then make a decision about whether or not to register and will send out a letter to the applicant, giving the decision.

Ofsted will send all applicants a web address, so that they can give feedback on how well the registration process was conducted. We want to use this feedback to improve our service, so we hope that everyone will take the opportunity to let us know about their experiences of this process.

## Variations and changes to registration

Providers can continue to make any requests for change to their registration, in writing to Ofsted's National Business Unit.

You may also want to pass on information to inspectors during their inspection visits. Inspectors will pass on the information to Ofsted's registration team, just as they did before September 2010. Ofsted will send out a letter or legal

notice confirming the outcome of the request.

If in doubt, telephone Ofsted using the general enquiries number (0300 123 1231).

## Suitable person interview

Where there is a change in manager, or a need to carry out a suitable person interview separate from the registration process, applicants should continue to contact Ofsted on the general enquiries number and Ofsted will ask Tribal or Prospects to arrange for an inspector to visit to carry out the interview.

Once the interview is complete, the inspector will send information to Ofsted to put alongside other information already available. Ofsted will decide on suitability and will inform the provider.

## Complaints about inspections

The vast majority of inspections are completed very well, but there may be rare occasions when providers feel they need to make a complaint about the quality of their inspection. Providers should send any complaints to Ofsted in the usual way and we will send your complaint to either Tribal or Prospects to investigate and respond to directly. The investigation will be carried out by managers who have not been involved in the inspection.

If providers feel that the complaint has not been dealt with as well as it should have been, you can ask Ofsted to investigate how well it has been carried out. Ofsted will write to you giving the outcome of the investigation. If you are still dissatisfied, your complaint can be sent to an independent adjudicator. All of this information is available on Ofsted's website at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## Complaints about providers

There will be no changes to the way in which complaints are made about providers. If you wish to make a complaint of that sort, please write to the National Business Unit in Manchester

(National Business Unit, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA). If you need any advice about how to do this, please ring Ofsted on the general number.

In the last few months, some of you have asked questions about the way Ofsted works now. We thought it would be helpful to set out some of those questions and our responses to them.

### Will I need to have another inspection now that Prospects and Tribal are conducting inspections for Ofsted?

No, you will only be inspected once in the current inspection cycle, that is between September 2008 and August 2012, unless your provision is 'inadequate' and a follow up visit is required.

### Will I still pay my fees to Ofsted?

Yes, you will continue to pay fees to Ofsted in the normal way.

### Will my inspection be delayed because of the handover to Tribal and Prospects?

No, Ofsted will continue to decide when your inspection should take place and all inspections will be completed by the end of the cycle.

### What does 'the transition period' mean?

The transition period is a time for Ofsted to work with Prospects and Tribal to make sure the inspection work is effectively transferred. It gives time for Prospects and Tribal to build their systems, prepare their offices and to carry out training. During that time inspections will continue as normal.

### Will Ofsted still be involved in inspecting and training?

Ofsted will continue to be involved in inspections. Ofsted will follow up all compliance issues and will monitor settings that are judged to be 'inadequate'. We will create training materials and will train the trainers that Prospects and Tribal employ.

### What would happen in terms of any

problems a provider might have with an inspection, or if they feel the resulting report is inaccurate?

Providers will be sent a copy of the report to check before publication. They will be given contact details so that they can send their comments to Prospects or Tribal. If the report has been published, or if they have concerns about the inspection, they should contact Ofsted using the dedicated phone number they have been given.

### How will Ofsted ensure inspections are consistent?

Ofsted has key performance indicators that set out exactly what Prospects and Tribal should do. Ofsted will monitor their work closely and will meet with them frequently to ensure that their work meets Ofsted's specifications. In addition, we will continue to provide guidance for inspections and handbooks for inspectors to follow. These handbooks will be published so that everyone can see what sort of inspection they should receive.

We will also be looking very closely at the feedback we get from providers after every inspection. This gives providers an opportunity to tell us about their experience of inspection. We hope everyone will return their forms so that we can get a national picture of the quality of inspection, and also use the views of providers to help us to improve the way inspections are carried out.

### How will new directives reach childminders?

Ofsted will make sure that through leaflets, letters and articles like this one, the information about changes to Ofsted or inspections is made available very quickly. Information about early years that is not related to inspections would normally come from Government, via the local authority.

Jean Humphrys, director of early years development

This article was originally published in September 2010, and has been updated