

Evaluation schedule for inspections of registered early years provision

Guidance and grade descriptors for inspecting registered early years provision from September 2012

The evaluation schedule provides outline guidance and grade descriptors for the judgements that inspectors will report on when inspecting registered early years providers who deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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Introduction

1. This evaluation schedule is for use during inspections of registered early years provision carried out from September 2012.

It sets out:

- the judgements that inspectors will make and report on
 - the aspects of the registered early years provision that inspectors will evaluate
 - outline guidance about the evidence that inspectors may gather
 - grade descriptors to guide inspectors in making their judgements in the inspection of registered early years provision.
2. It should not be used to inspect early years provision in maintained and independent schools that is not registered, or provision registered on the Childcare Register.
 3. The outline guidance is not exhaustive but is intended to guide inspectors on the range and type of evidence they might collect.
 4. The evaluation schedule must be used in conjunction with the guidance set out in *Conducting early years inspections*,¹ the *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012*² and *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*.³

Inspection judgements

5. Inspectors will judge the overall quality and standards of the early years provision, taking into account three key judgements:
 - how well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend
 - the contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being
 - the leadership and management of the early years provision.⁴

¹ *Conducting early years inspections* (120087), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120087.

² *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012*, DfE, 2012; <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-00023-2012>.

³ *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, DfE, 2012; <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearnandchildcare/delivery/education/a0068102/early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs>.

⁴ Throughout this document, 'leadership and management' includes childminders as leaders of their own provision. Where appropriate, any reference to staff also relates to childminding assistants.

6. Inspectors are required to weigh up the evidence in a particular area and to consider it against the descriptors for outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate before making a professional judgement.
7. Inspectors must apply professional knowledge and experience when using the criteria. They must take account of the context of the provision inspected, in particular children's ages, stages of development, the amount of time children spend at the setting each week, and the length of time children that attend for.
8. Children should have access to high-quality early years provision in order to make the most of their talents and abilities. It is important to be clear about the main features of such provision and so the grade descriptors for good are more detailed than the other grade descriptors. When evaluating each aspect of the early years provision, inspectors **must** start by considering whether the provision meets the descriptors for good, and whether it is better than good, or worse.
9. Inspectors **must** then consider which descriptor best fits the evidence available. When evidence indicates that **any** of the bullet points in the descriptor for inadequate apply, that aspect of the early years provision **must** be judged inadequate.
10. Inspectors are required to consider the evidence from the whole evaluation schedule when making the overall judgement on the quality and standards of the early years provision.

Children's needs

11. Inspections focus on how well individual children benefit from their early years experience. It is important to test the provider's response to individual needs by observing how well they help **all** children to make effective progress, especially those whose needs or circumstances require particularly perceptive intervention and/or additional support. In any particular provision, this may include:
 - disabled children, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and those who have special educational needs
 - boys
 - girls
 - groups of children with starting points that are significantly below those expected for their age
 - those who are easily able to exceed expectations for their age
 - children from disadvantaged families and/or backgrounds, including:
 - funded two-year-olds
 - looked after children

- children for whom English is an additional language
- children of service families.

Descriptors and guidance

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

12. Inspectors must evaluate and report on:

- the impact of practitioners on children's learning and development, whether children make the best possible progress taking into account their starting points and capabilities, the length of time they have been at the setting, and how often they attend.

Criteria

13. When evaluating how well the provision meets the needs of the children who attend, inspectors must consider:

- the extent to which educational programmes for the prime and specific areas of learning⁵ help all children to reach expected levels of development as indicated in *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage* and, if not, the reasons why they do not
- the extent to which all children are supported to acquire the skills and capacity to develop and learn effectively, and to be ready for the next stages in their learning, especially school (where applicable)
- how well practitioners demonstrate high expectations, enthuse, engage and motivate children
- how well practitioners: work with parents to help children to settle; engage parents in their children's development and learning in the setting and at home; help parents share what they know about their children; and keep parents informed about their children's achievements and progress.

⁵ The prime areas of learning are: personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; and physical development. The specific areas of learning are: literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design.

Evidence

14. The main evidence comes from inspectors' direct observations of the way in which children engage with their environment through play, exploration and active learning, and practitioners' input in facilitating learning.
15. Direct observation should be supplemented by a range of other evidence to enable inspectors to evaluate the impact that practitioners have on the progress children make in their learning. Such additional evidence should include:
 - evidence of assessment that includes the progress of different groups of children:
 - assessment on entry, including parental contributions
 - two-year-old progress checks (where applicable)
 - ongoing (formative) assessments, including any parental contributions
 - the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (where applicable) or any other summative assessment when children leave
 - evidence of planning for children's next stages of learning based on staff assessment and a secure knowledge of the characteristics of learning⁶ and children's development⁷
 - evidence from observations, including:
 - the inspector's own observations of children's responses to activities
 - any joint observations with managers or early years professionals
 - any evidence of practitioners' observations
 - the inspector's tracking of selected children, including children of different ages, funded two-year-olds and other children whose circumstances may suggest they need particular intervention or support
 - discussions with practitioners, key persons, managers, parents and children.
16. Inspectors must use their professional judgement to interpret and apply the grade descriptors where: only babies and very young children are present; there are funded two-year-olds or other groups who may be disadvantaged; or the children receive their main Early Years Foundation Stage experience elsewhere.
17. Where there is a mixed age range present, inspectors must note any differences in progress for children of different ages, and make a 'best fit' judgement.

⁶ Using the three characteristics set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage and exemplified in *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage* as a basis.

⁷ Inspectors should refer to *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage* when gathering such evidence.

18. Inspectors must consider whether provision meets the descriptors for good, or whether it is better or worse. For provision to be outstanding it must meet all of the criteria in the grade descriptors for good, plus all or nearly all of the additional descriptors for outstanding.

Outstanding (1)	The provision is better than good because: ■ It consistently achieves very high standards across all aspects of its work with exceptional educational programmes for children of all ages. Practice is inspirational and worthy of dissemination to other providers. ■ There are rich, varied and imaginative experiences for children delivered by practitioners who have very high expectations of themselves and the children, expert knowledge of the areas of learning, and a clear understanding of how children learn. ■ Assessment at all ages is precise, sharply focused and includes all those involved in the child's learning. It is monitored and used to secure timely interventions and support, based on a comprehensive knowledge of the child and their family. ■ Children are well motivated, very eager to join in and consistently demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning. The extremely sharp focus on helping them to acquire communication and language skills, and on supporting their physical, personal, social and emotional development helps all children make rapid improvement in their learning from their starting points with any gaps closing rapidly. They are exceptionally well prepared for school or the next steps in their learning. ■ Highly successful strategies engage all parents in their children's learning in the setting and at home.
Good (2)	The provision is good because: ■ The educational programmes have depth and breadth across the seven areas of learning. They provide interesting and challenging experiences that meet the needs of all children. ■ The vast majority of practice is based on a secure knowledge and understanding of how to promote the learning and development of young children. Practice is consistently at least good and occasionally outstanding. ■ All practitioners have high expectations of all children based on accurate assessment of children's prior skills, knowledge and understanding on entry to the setting. Practitioners complete regular and precise assessments of children and use these effectively to plan suitably challenging activities. They regularly listen perceptively to, carefully observe, and skilfully question children during activities in order to re-shape tasks and explanations to improve learning. ■ Practitioners can demonstrate that all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language, are progressing well towards the early learning goals over time, given their starting points. Children are interested and keen learners who display the characteristics of

	effective learning. ■ Children are supported in the acquisition of communication and language skills and in their physical, personal, social and emotional development so that children of all ages and abilities make good progress in their learning. All children are generally working comfortably within the typical range of development expected for their age, taking account of any special educational needs and/or disabilities. Where children's starting points are below those of other children of their age, assessment shows they are improving consistently over a sustained period and the gap is closing. Children's progress in the prime areas of learning ensures they have the key skills needed for the next steps in their learning, including school where appropriate. ■ The key person system supports engagement with all parents, including those who may be more reluctant to contribute. Parents contribute to initial assessments of children's starting points on entry and they are kept well informed about their children's progress. Parents are encouraged to support and share information about their children's learning and development at home. The key person system ensures all practitioners use effective, targeted strategies and interventions to support learning that match most children's individual needs.
Satisfactory (3)	Provision does not meet the grade descriptors for good.
Inadequate (4)	Provision is inadequate if one or more of the following apply. ■ Educational programmes do not adequately cover the seven areas of learning and/or do not provide interesting activities in enough depth or breadth and/or do not provide adequate challenge for children resulting in some children lacking enthusiasm for learning. ■ Some practitioners have a poor understanding of the prime and/or specific areas of learning resulting in weak practice that is not matched to all children's needs. ■ Planning is not effective in matching activities to children's needs. Observations and assessment are not consistent in quality and/or are not frequent or accurate enough to build on children's progress. ■ Children's development is not as good as it should be given their starting points and/or the learning and progress of individual or specific groups of children does not match levels of progress made by most children. These gaps show little sign of closing or may be widening. ■ Children are not well prepared for school or their next stage of learning. ■ Strategies for engaging with parents are weak and/or focused too much on care practices.

The contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being

19. Inspectors must evaluate and report on:

- the effectiveness of care practices in helping children feel emotionally secure and ensuring children are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.

Criteria

20. When evaluating children's well-being, inspectors must consider the extent to which:

- practice ensures all children, especially very young children and those in need of additional support, are forming appropriate bonds and secure emotional attachments with carers
- care practices ensure children are happy and enjoy what they doing, learn to behave well and play cooperatively, develop independence, explore their surroundings and use their imagination, and talk and play with adults and each other
- practitioners support children to develop an understanding of the importance of physical exercise and a healthy diet, and to manage their own hygiene and personal needs
- children are prepared for their transition within the setting into other early years settings, and into maintained nursery provision and/or reception class.

Evidence

21. The main evidence comes from inspectors' direct observations of care practices, children's behaviour and their interactions with practitioners and each other. Direct observation should be supplemented by a range of other evidence to enable inspectors to evaluate the impact that practitioners have on children's well-being. Such additional evidence should include:

- evidence of planning for the prime areas of learning and especially for children's personal, social and emotional development
- evidence of assessment of children's well-being
- discussions with practitioners, children and parents and with managers about the key person system
- inspectors' tracking of children's care arrangements.

22. To reach an overall judgement about the contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children, inspectors must use their professional judgement to consider the impact of the care experiences on children's all-round development.

23. Inspectors must consider whether provision meets the descriptors for good, or whether it is better or worse. For provision to be outstanding it must meet all of the criteria in the grade descriptors for good, plus all or nearly all of the additional descriptors for outstanding.

Outstanding (1)	Care practices are better than good because: ■ All practitioners are highly skilled and sensitive in helping children form secure emotional attachments, and provide a strong base for their developing independence and exploration. ■ Children increasingly show high levels of self-control during activities and confidence in social situations, and are developing an excellent understanding of how to manage risks and challenges relative to their age. ■ All practitioners consistently give the highest priority to the safety of children and effectively support children's growing understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. ■ There is a highly stimulating environment with child-accessible resources that promote learning and challenge children both in and outdoors. ■ The strong skills of all key persons ensure all children are well prepared for the next stages in their learning. Practitioners skilfully support children's transitions both within the setting and to other settings and school.
Good (2)	Care practices are good because: ■ A well-established key person system helps children form secure attachments and promotes their well-being and independence. ■ Practitioners are good role models. They are deployed well, use consistently applied strategies and provide clear guidance for children about what is acceptable behaviour. Relationships are strong at all levels and children are learning to respect and tolerate each other's differences. Children are gaining an understanding of risk through activities that encourage them to explore their environment. ■ Practitioners have a good understanding of and give a high priority to the safety of children. Children's behaviour shows that they feel safe in the setting. They are able to share concerns with their key person or other adults at the setting. Practitioners give clear messages to children to ensure they are developing a good understanding of why it is important to have a healthy diet and gain an understanding of the need for physical exercise. Practitioners help children to learn to be independent and encourage them to manage their own personal needs. Children are competent at managing their personal needs relative to their ages. ■ There is a stimulating, well-resourced and welcoming environment, both in and outdoors, to support children's all-round development and emotional well-being, which provides a range of experiences that develop children's growing independence and cooperation. ■ Children are well prepared for the next stage in their learning because practitioners provide appropriate support to prepare them for their transitions, both within the setting and to other settings and school.

Satisfactory (3)	Care practices do not meet the grade descriptors for good.
Inadequate (4)	Care practices are inadequate if one or more of the following apply. ■ The key person system is not well embedded. Care practices are variable and do not support all children's emotional well-being and welfare, with some children failing to form secure attachments with their carers. ■ Children's behaviour is not managed consistently. Some children are not engaged in activities and contribute more than occasionally to reduced learning and/or a disorderly environment that hinders learning and puts themselves and others at risk. ■ Not all practitioners have sufficient knowledge and/or practitioners are not vigilant enough to ensure that children are kept safe and that their health and welfare are promoted and/or to help children develop enough understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy relative to their ages. ■ The environment and/or resources are not welcoming and/or safe. They may be of poor quality and/or they are not used well enough to provide challenge for children or engage their interest. ■ Children are poorly prepared for their transitions within the setting and/or to other settings and school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

24. Inspectors must evaluate and report on:

- the effectiveness of the leadership and management in understanding and implementing the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Criteria

25. When evaluating the quality of leadership and management, inspectors must consider the extent to which providers:

- fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including overseeing the educational programmes
- fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage at all times, implementing them consistently to create an environment that is welcoming, safe and stimulating
- have rigorous and effective systems for self-evaluation that inform the setting's priorities and are used to set challenging targets for improvement

- have effective systems for performance management and the continuous professional development of staff
- have effective partnerships with parents and external agencies that help to secure appropriate interventions for children to receive the support they need.

Evidence

26. The main evidence comes from interviews with the manager and/or registered provider or their nominee, supplemented by discussion with staff and parents and, if needed, sampling of policies and procedures. Inspectors should obtain evidence of:
- how well practitioners and any trainees or students are monitored, coached, mentored and supported, and how under-performance is tackled
 - the effectiveness of a programme of professional development arising from identified staff needs
 - the extent and range of completed training, including child protection and the impact of that training in improving children's well-being
 - the effectiveness of the staff's monitoring and revision of the educational programmes to ensure that they have sufficient depth, breadth and challenge, and reflect the needs, aptitudes and interest of children
 - the effectiveness of the monitoring of children's progress and interventions where needed to ensure that gaps are narrowing for groups of children or individual children identified as being in need of support
 - the effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding, including recruitment practices and how well safe practices and a culture of safety are promoted and understood
 - how well required policies and procedures are implemented
 - the effectiveness of self-evaluation, including contributions from parents, carers and other stakeholders
 - whether well-focused improvement plans have been implemented through engagement with staff, children, parents and carers
 - the effectiveness of arrangements for information sharing and partnership working with other providers, schools and professionals in order to identify all children's needs and help them to make progress.
27. Inspectors must use their professional judgement to interpret and apply the grade descriptors for childminders.
28. Inspectors must consider whether provision meets the descriptors for good, or whether it is better or worse. For provision to be outstanding it must meet all of the criteria in the grade descriptors for good, plus all or nearly all of the additional descriptors for outstanding.

Outstanding (1)	Leadership and management are better than good because: ■ Leadership is inspirational. The pursuit of excellence in all of the setting's activities is demonstrated by an uncompromising, highly successful and well-documented drive to strongly improve achievement, or maintain the highest levels of achievement, for all children over a sustained period of time. ■ The provider has an excellent understanding of their responsibility to ensure that the provision meets the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and has effective systems to monitor their implementation. ■ High-quality professional supervision is provided, based on consistent and sharply focused evaluations of the impact of staff's practice. An astute and targeted programme of professional development ensures practitioners are constantly improving their already first rate understanding and practice. ■ Children's needs are quickly identified and exceptionally well met through highly effective partnerships between the setting, parents, external agencies and other providers.
Good (2)	Leadership and management are good because: ■ There is a good overview of the curriculum through monitoring of educational programmes to ensure a broad range of experiences to help children progress to the early learning goals. This is based on a good, secure understanding of the areas of learning and how children learn. ■ Planning and assessment are monitored to make sure they are consistent, precise, and display an accurate understanding of all children's skills, abilities and progress. Individual children or groups of children with identified needs are targeted so that appropriate interventions are sought and gaps are closing. ■ The safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are understood by leaders and managers and are met. Arrangements for safeguarding children are strong and well embedded. Clear policies and procedures are known and understood by all staff and implemented consistently. ■ Thorough self-evaluation takes into account the views of staff, children and their parents and is the result of careful monitoring, analysis and self-challenge. The drive for improvement is demonstrated by a clear and successful improvement plan that supports children's achievements over time. Strengths and weaknesses are effectively identified. Planned actions to overcome weaknesses have been concerted and effective. There are strong links between identified priorities and plans for improvement. ■ There are effective systems for performance management. Management and accountability arrangements are understood and consistently applied. Practitioners are monitored and under-performance is tackled. An effective and well-established programme of professional development is helping practitioners to improve their

	knowledge, understanding and practice. ■ Partnerships with parents, external agencies and other providers are well established and make a strong contribution to meeting children's needs. Appropriate interventions are secured and children receive the support they need.
Satisfactory (3)	Leadership and management do not meet the grade descriptors for good.
Inadequate (4)	Leadership and managements are inadequate if one or more of the following apply. ■ There is too little understanding of the learning and development requirements, resulting in poor monitoring of children's progress, particularly for individual or groups of children who are underachieving. ■ There is ineffective monitoring of practitioners resulting in inconsistent practice and poor identification of training needs and/or practitioners do not have access to an adequate programme of professional development. ■ There are one or more breaches of safeguarding and welfare requirements that have an impact on the safety and well-being of children. ■ Self-evaluation is weak and has too little impact. Any actions taken to tackle areas of identified weakness have been insufficient or ineffective. Providers are not sufficiently ambitious about improving provision and practice, including motivating staff. ■ Management and accountability arrangements are not clear or are not understood by providers and/or their managers. Practitioners are not encouraged to improve their knowledge or practice. ■ Links with parents, other settings or professionals involved in supporting children's care and education are not strong enough to ensure that individual needs are identified and met.

The overall quality and standards of the early years provision

29. Inspectors must evaluate and report on:

- how well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend
- the contribution of the early years provision to children's well-being
- the leadership and management of the early years provision.

Criteria

30. Inspectors should take account of all the judgements made across the evaluation schedule. In particular, inspectors must consider:

- the progress all children make in their learning and development relative to their starting points and their readiness for the next stage of their education
- the extent to which the learning and care provided by the setting meets the needs of the range of children who attend, including the needs of any children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- children's personal and emotional development, including whether they feel safe and are secure and happy
- whether the requirements for children's safeguarding and welfare have been met
- the effectiveness of leadership and management in evaluating practice and securing continuous improvement that improves children's life chances.

Outstanding (1)	■ The setting's practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for all children and staff, enables children to make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and prepares them extremely well for school or the next stage in their learning. ■ All major aspects of the provision are at least good, and outstanding in most respects, with all legal requirements met.
Good (2)	■ The setting's practice enables all children to do well, make good progress relative to their starting points and prepares them well for school or the next stage of their learning. Children benefit from practice that is at least good and sometimes outstanding. ■ No aspects of the setting are inadequate and all legal requirements are met. The judgement on 'How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend' is at least good.
Satisfactory (3)	■ The setting's practice is not good enough because one or more key aspects of its work require improvement.
Inadequate (4)	■ Overall effectiveness is likely to be inadequate if any of the key judgements are inadequate. ■ If any of the key judgements are inadequate, but inspectors judge Overall effectiveness to be better than inadequate, inspectors must consider leadership and management's ability to bring about rapid and sustained improvement.