



How to Be Outstanding

The Ofsted Inspection Guide



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About this guide

When I was working in settings, a visit from Ofsted was something we all seemed to dread, regardless of how amazing our practice was. Sadly, many early years educators and managers still feel the same way when inspection day rolls around.

The culmination of up to 6 years of hard work and the fear of something going wrong, all coming together on inspection day, can feel like a huge amount of pressure. And for leaders and managers, it can feel pretty lonely at the top.

So we wanted to help.

With so much to think about, how do you know what to focus on in order to get the grading you know you deserve? How can you really be sure that you're focusing on the right thing to make your setting outstanding day in and day out?

We've spoken to settings who've achieved an Outstanding grade and collected all their inspiring tips for improving your provision, as well as how to shine on the all-important day that Ofsted comes. Plus, we've sat down with Ofsted inspectors themselves to find out what they're really looking for, so you're prepared with everything you need to know, to get the grade you deserve.

With all that said, it's still really important to remember that while Ofsted's grading is important, it is not the be-all and end-all of your practice and provision. Use this guide to help you out with tips and tricks, but most of all, use it to remind you that you're not alone. The early years works best when we all work together, collaborating on sharing skills and knowledge, and sharing the pressure too.

[My inbox is always open.](#)



Julia Bethan Rose, Early Education Editor, Family.

Reaching a judgement of outstanding

Outstanding is a challenging and exacting judgement. In order to reach this standard, inspectors will determine whether the early years provision meets all the criteria set out under 'good' for that judgement and does so securely and consistently. In other words, it is not enough that the provision is strong against some aspects of the judgement and not against others: it must meet each and every criterion. In addition, there are further criteria set out under the outstanding judgement, all of which the provision will also need to meet. Provision should only be judged 'outstanding' in a particular area if it is performing exceptionally, and this exceptional performance in that area is consistent and secure across the whole provision.

[The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted](#)

Our expert contributors

In this guide you'll hear from:



Wendy Ratcliff
HMI, Ofsted

Wendy is one of His Majesty's Inspectors at Ofsted and is the Principal Officer for Early Education. Wendy played a key role in developing the latest Education Inspection Framework.



Phil Minns
HMI, Ofsted

Phil is Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum and a qualified teacher, with specialist knowledge of early years education.



Lizzy Barlow & Becky Pike
Nursery Group Leader
Director, Hollies Day Nurseries

Hollies Day Nurseries consist of five settings in Nottingham. Hollies are progressive and forward-thinking, making sure that each child has a unique journey towards becoming a life-long learner. Their Sherwood setting was judged to be Outstanding in 2022.



Ailsa Monk
Principal, Cotswold
Montessori School

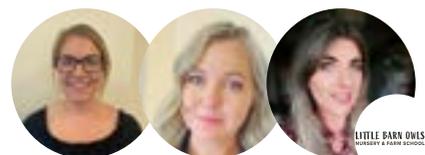
Cotswold Montessori School is located in specially converted farm buildings in the beautiful North Cotswolds. They aim to create a safe and caring home environment for children filled with opportunities to engage and learn. Their Guiting site was judged to be Outstanding in 2022.

... and from:



Joanne Routledge
Owner and Manager, Kinder
Park Nursery

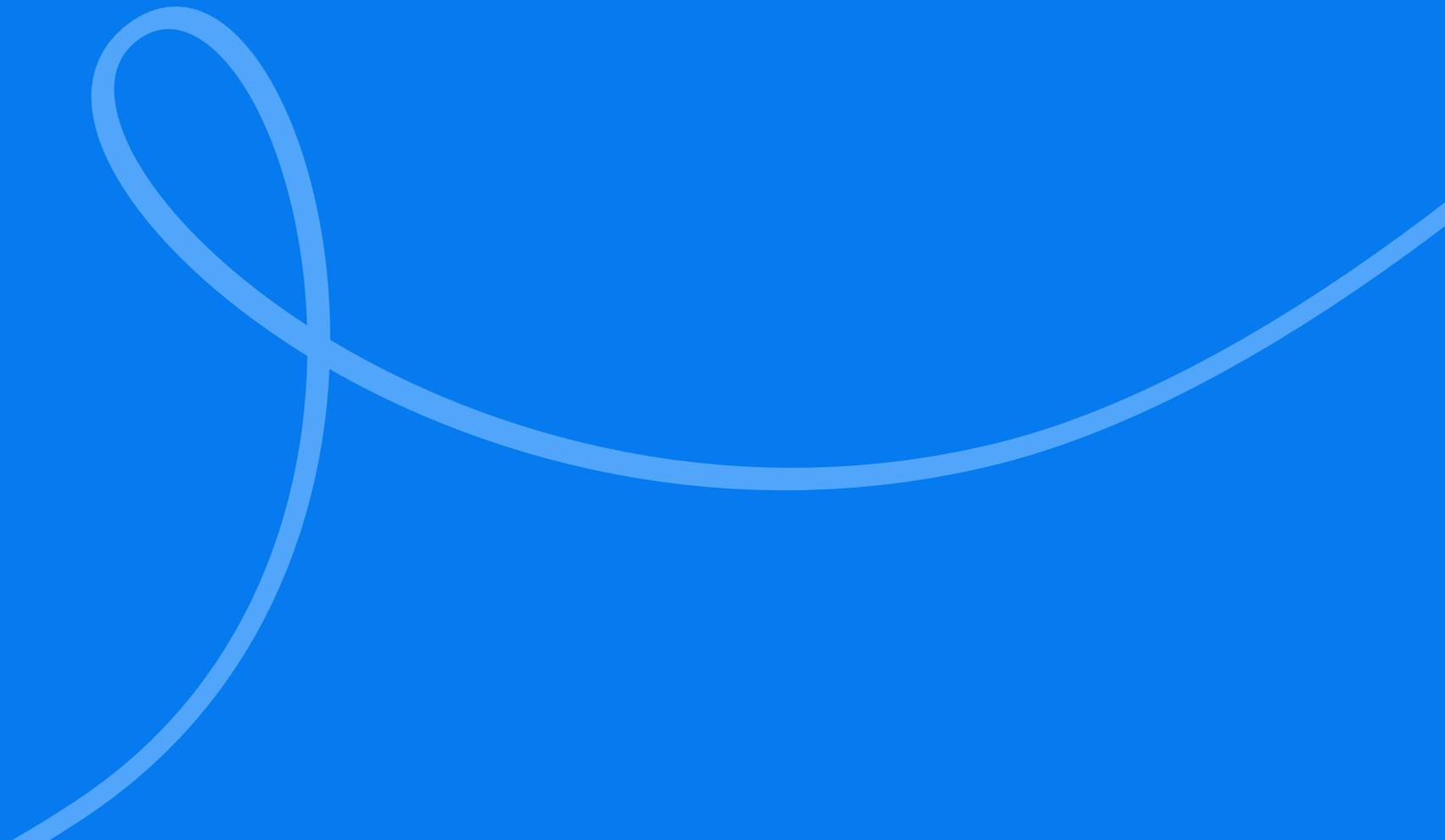
Joanne has owned and managed Kinder Park since she was 22. Kinder Park received their 4th consecutive 'Outstanding' judgement in July 2022. Kinder Park are committed to providing an outstanding environment, where all children reach their full potential, through high-quality care and education from their knowledgeable and dedicated staff team.



**Kerry Smith, Charlotte
Bateman & Charlotte Moss**
Group Head of Children and Adults'
Education
Managing Director
Southwater Manager,
Little Barn Owls Nursery and Farm School

Little Barn Owls Farm and Forest Schools have three settings around West Sussex, all of which have been judged to be Outstanding. Little Barn Owls is inspired by Reggio Emilia Approach and when children aren't working with professional artists, they might be caring for the resident farm animals or exploring their own 11 acres of woodland. The LBO ethos is to nurture confident, caring and curious children.

Getting ready for an Ofsted inspection



Getting ready for an Ofsted inspection

It's not about having a special Ofsted inspection plan but making sure you get to really show off all the amazing work you do day-to-day. Here are some top tips to help you keep calm and carry on as normal, right from when you get 'The Call'.



What to do when you get 'The Call'

The team at Hollies Day Nursery have strategies for when they get that phone call, which can make the difference between good and outstanding.

- After the phone call - inform everybody straight away
- Get the nursery clean and ready
- Make sure everyone feels confident about their room
- Don't put something in you haven't done before
- Hold a quick meeting the night before to tell all the staff how amazing they are
- Get other practitioners to share their experience from past inspections



Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow, Director and Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

I re-read the inspection handbook the night before. We have it hanging in the office anyway, so we're familiar with it, but I took the time to make some notes too so I felt really prepared.



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park

The call is the first point for you to really sell yourself. To say "Yes, come on, we're ready for you, we're looking forward to it, can't wait to show you around." Be positive. Be competent. Ordered. Ask questions. Sell yourself, because that's effectively what you're doing.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

I was on the floor with the children when the Ofsted inspector rang, but she asked if I needed 20 minutes just to get out of the room and sorted. That was a blessing as I could just take a moment to catch my breath.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Telling the staff

As it was some of the staff's first Ofsted inspections, we broke down for the team exactly what would happen and how the day would run, so they knew exactly what to expect. The worry around Ofsted so often comes from the 'unknown', so we wanted to fully explain to them how it works.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

I waited until the end of the day to tell the staff so that they could just go home and relax as much as possible. There's nothing that we needed to do or change that day specifically for Ofsted's visit.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

After the call, when we let the staff know Ofsted were coming, we spoke to each of them about their individual strengths, as those are what we really want to show off to Ofsted.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Telling the parents

We put a post out on Family to let the parents know that Ofsted were coming the next day and to expect to see her at the setting. We also let them know that the inspector might want to talk to them, so they were welcome to have a chat to her.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater



What about paperwork?





What about paperwork?

When we spoke to Ofsted, they told us that they're not interested in piles of assessment and tracking paperwork. However, it's important to understand the type of paperwork that the inspectors will ask for, so you can be completely prepared when they arrive.

How well do you know the children?

Our inspector did not want to see any paperwork about the children, it was all through verbal communication and observation. She really wanted to see how well we knew them. There was a huge emphasis on the key person system as your educators have to know why they're doing what they're doing with those children.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Our inspector spoke to different educators about the same child to be sure that everybody knew that child well. She didn't want all of the paperwork, she wanted to know that everybody actually knew the children. She asked one educator about a child, then asked another one about how they were supporting that child, to make sure it was consistent.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

The most important thing to remember on the day is that inspectors are charged with finding out what it's like as a child in the setting. We do a range of activities to assess that but have now moved away from prioritising data and paperwork.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

Policies and procedures

You can buy policies and procedures off the shelf but you will not understand them because they were somebody else's documents. So when the inspector asks you why they are like that it's going to be difficult. The inspectors will realise if you know what you're talking about or not.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

During "The Call" the day before, our inspector went through all of the paperwork I needed to show her, which was really helpful so I could be prepared. She told me the main policies and procedures she wanted to see, so I could quickly refresh those in my memory too.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Top tip: No tick-lists or tracking

One of the things we've made clear, in terms of our Education Inspection Framework, is that Ofsted inspectors will not want to see ticklists, tracking, or assessment data.



Wendy Ratcliff
HMI, Ofsted

High-quality interactions

We know that children do best when they have high-quality interactions with adults. You've got to really carefully consider whether the benefits of doing anything that takes you away from spending time with the children, like paperwork, is more beneficial than simply working with the children.



Phil Minns

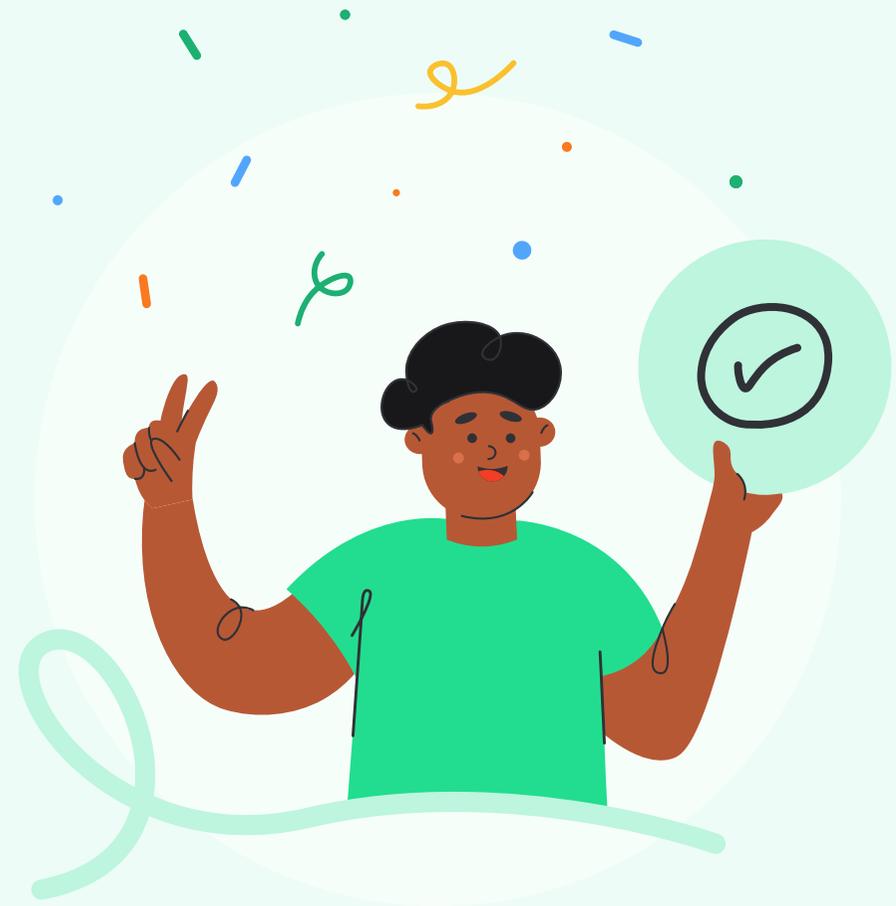
Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Ofsted

Overall effectiveness



Overall effectiveness

The 'Overall effectiveness' judgement is made by considering all of the 4 judgements, alongside how effective safeguarding is. Safeguarding will naturally be any setting's priority, but for inspection day, this is where your team really need to know their stuff.



Grade descriptors for the provision's overall effectiveness: Outstanding

- The quality of education is outstanding.
- All other judgements are likely to be outstanding. In exceptional circumstances, one of the judgements may be good, as long as there is convincing evidence that it is improving this area rapidly and securely towards outstanding.
- Safeguarding is effective.
- There are no breaches of EYFS requirements.

[The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted](#)

Knowing safeguarding inside out

When we're checking the team's safeguarding understanding, we try to ask the questions in different ways and then break down their answer by asking more questions. We want them to be ready for when Ofsted asks them something and not just give a learned answer. The understanding's got to be there too.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

You have to know your safeguarding policies as that's at the forefront of everything you do. It has to be consistent across your staff team and not just for Ofsted. Our inspector told us that the safeguarding questions are so important that if they're not answered properly, you lose your 'Outstanding' grade. Our core function is to keep children safe so everybody has to know how to do it.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Our inspector asked about safeguarding in a lot of detail. She asked about online safety, county lines, radicalisation, ratios in the rooms, prevent duty, and how we supported staff wellbeing during covid.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Striving for continuous improvement

As a team, we're continually 'preparing' for inspection day. We had our last visit from Ofsted in July and we don't think 'Oh, they've been now, put your feet up!' We're continuously looking at ways that we can improve the setting and what we deliver to the children and their families. It's an ongoing programme of development.



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

Showing off your strengths

Our environment is always set. Our standards are always set. Our safeguarding is always set. But on the day we really want to show off where our staff's strengths are and elevate that.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Your nursery values

You've got to know who you are and why you do what you do, through your curriculum and your beliefs. You can't fake that on the day. It has to be embedded.



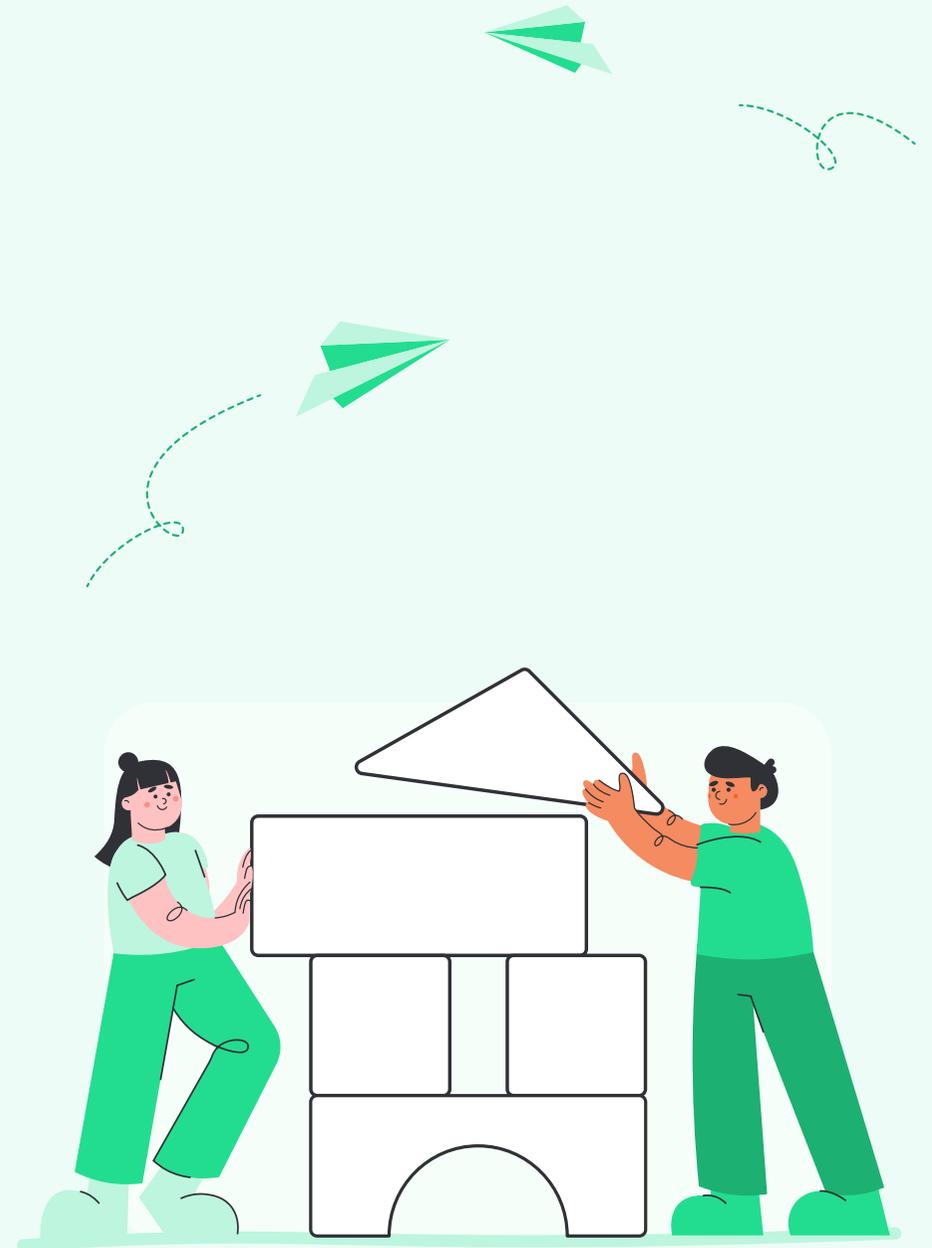
Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Quality of education



Quality of education

Quality of education is assessed by three main criteria: Intent, Implementation and Impact, but this covers a broad range of activities. Inspectors will be looking at educators' interactions with children and how they make the most of teachable moments, as well as how the setting's curriculum is sequenced and delivered. Ofsted will want to see how educators know what children know and can do and how this knowledge is used to plan for their development.



Grade descriptors for the quality of education: Outstanding

The provider meets all the criteria for a good quality of education securely and consistently. The quality of education at this setting is exceptional.

In addition, the following apply:

- The provider's curriculum intent and implementation are embedded securely and consistently across the provision. It is evident from what practitioners do that they have a firm and common understanding of the provider's curriculum intent and what it means for their practice. Across all parts of the provision, practitioners' interactions with children are of a high quality and contribute well to delivering the curriculum intent.
- Children's experiences over time are consistently and coherently arranged to build cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for their future learning.
- The impact of the curriculum on what children know, can remember and do is highly effective. Children demonstrate this through being deeply engaged in their work and play and sustaining high levels of concentration. Children, including those children from disadvantaged backgrounds, do well. Children with SEND achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Children consistently use new vocabulary that enables them to communicate effectively. They speak with increasing confidence and fluency, which means that they secure strong foundations for future learning, especially in preparation for them to become fluent readers.

[The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted](#)

Be comfortable with Ofsted vocabulary

We do a lot of training on the three I's (Intent, Implementation, Impact) all the time, so the team are really comfortable with it. We also have the three Is as part of practice prompts in our aprons all the time, so we're using them all the time.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Inspectors can ask simple questions in complicated ways. So if you can prep your staff with the language of Ofsted by using the handbook as part of your training, it just puts them at ease and lets them be themselves.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Intent, Implementation, and Impact

We've put the substance of education and the curriculum at the heart of the inspection framework, through the all-important Quality of Education judgement. The learning walk gives leaders the opportunity to:

- Say what their intent is (how they decide the content of their curriculum),
- Talk about their implementation (in terms of how they deliver their curriculum through teaching, their pedagogy)
- And explain how they evaluate the impact.

We look at 'Intent, Implementation, and Impact' as a whole.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

Intent

Intent relates to how educators plan their curriculum and strive to build knowledge, skills and ambition in a way that is appropriate for all learners, and how this can be adapted for those who have additional needs or SEND.

What's meant by Intent

Intent is about how you decide what it is that your children need to learn. It's about knowing your children, the experiences they bring with them to your setting, celebrating those experiences, and identifying what gaps they might have. Ultimately, what early years providers do in their settings will make all the difference.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

Knowing your intent

The three I's were a big part of our inspection, "Why are you doing that? What are you hoping to achieve from that?" She wanted to know if we knew why we do things the way we do.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Changes to the environment

If there are changes to your environment, be aware of how you've dealt with that. For example, if you have an influx of children who all have English as an additional language, they'll want to know what you've done about it and how it's changed your environment. The same with SEND, and EYPP - how are you using that funding to help support that child's growth?



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

What you want for children

It's about why you do what you do and what your values are. It's about what you believe about children and what children should have access to. It's about what you think children's rights should be and what you want to create for them.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

A path through the curriculum

We want providers to really know their children so they can plot that path for them, through the curriculum. We want to see that depth of knowledge where they know what that child could do when they set foot in the setting, what they're getting better at, and what they're working on. You've got to keep in mind the big picture of where you want that child to get to at the end.



Phil Minns, Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Ofsted

Implementation

Implementation focuses on how your plans for curriculum play out in the reality of your setting, making sure that your approach is relevant. In particular how you teach, how educators communicate with your children and parents, and how they encourage ambition and understand appropriate forms of assessment.

Supporting babies and toddlers

In our baby and toddler rooms, the inspector asked specific questions about how we were supporting the prime areas of learning. She asked leadership and a member of staff, to check whether the answers were consistent.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

The learning walk

We've put a greater emphasis on the learning walk as it's an opportunity for leaders and managers to explain to inspectors their rationale for their EYFS curriculum and how they set out their early years provision. How they decide what it is that the children in their setting need to learn, and why.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

Teachable moments

The inspector watched meal times very closely and throughout the day was really looking to how the team interacted with the children and reacted in the moment. She wanted to see if the educators made the most of teachable moments.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Supporting EAL and SEND

The inspector chose to observe children with additional needs and EAL and wanted a lot of detail about how we were supporting them. She didn't want to hear, "Oh, that child has a speech and language difficulty," she wanted to know exactly what the difficulties were, and what we were doing to support that. Even when the team answered that we were using a certain strategy, she'd ask "OK, how are you doing that?" It wasn't an interrogation or anything like that, but she wanted to be sure that the understanding was really embedded.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Being a sensitive educator

Our inspector used the terminology 'sensitive educator' a lot and she was really checking to see that the team gave the children time and were responding appropriately to children. She wanted to see if the staff could articulate why they were doing a certain activity like, "Well, that child was struggling with this so we've chosen that to support them." She wanted to see those personal touches.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Top tip: Correcting your mistakes

A member of staff was doing an activity with playdough when a child wanted to come in and put water in the playdough and she stopped him. That is not outstanding practice. But within 30 seconds she realised she'd made a mistake and so in front of the inspector she went to her line manager and said 'I've made a mistake and I need to change it'. Together they brought the child back in, brought the water with them and they developed the activity into something completely different. In her report, the inspector noted specifically that this was outstanding practice. She said it doesn't matter that she made a mistake, she acknowledged it, she did something about it, and she engaged the child with the child-initiated choice. That was the outstanding practice.



Lizzy Barlow & Becky Pike

Nursery Group Leader Director, Hollies Day Nurseries

Impact

How does the implementation of the EYFS actually affect the individual learners? Key factors to consider are how skills such as speech and language, comprehension, mathematical concepts and motor skills have improved, and how ready older children are for their transition to Key Stage 1.



Individual learning plans

What really swung it for us was how well we know our children. Every child has an individual learning plan and twice a year we take the time to make assessments on how the children are doing and produce a CoEL report on them. We use our own practitioner knowledge for that which helps us to understand our children really well.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Evaluating impact

We tried a new approach to our environment and teaching as I'd felt it was what we should be doing. But we found it just didn't work for us, as a setting. The children were so much more engaged in their play with the toys we had before. We came back together as a staff team and we decided to keep a few elements that did work and added those to our ethos, but we'd never keep pushing something that wasn't working or benefitting the children



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

Time in the classroom

At the beginning of each big term I spend a whole day in each class with the teachers to track the children's development. I also observe how the classroom runs, how the teachers are teaching, how the routines are and so on. That is my monitoring system to make sure no child is left behind and that we always have things to improve on.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

How do the children themselves feel?

We want to find out what it's like to be a child in this place and the best way to do that is via direct observation and interactions with adults and with children. What's their journey been like? We want to hear the child's voice as well.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

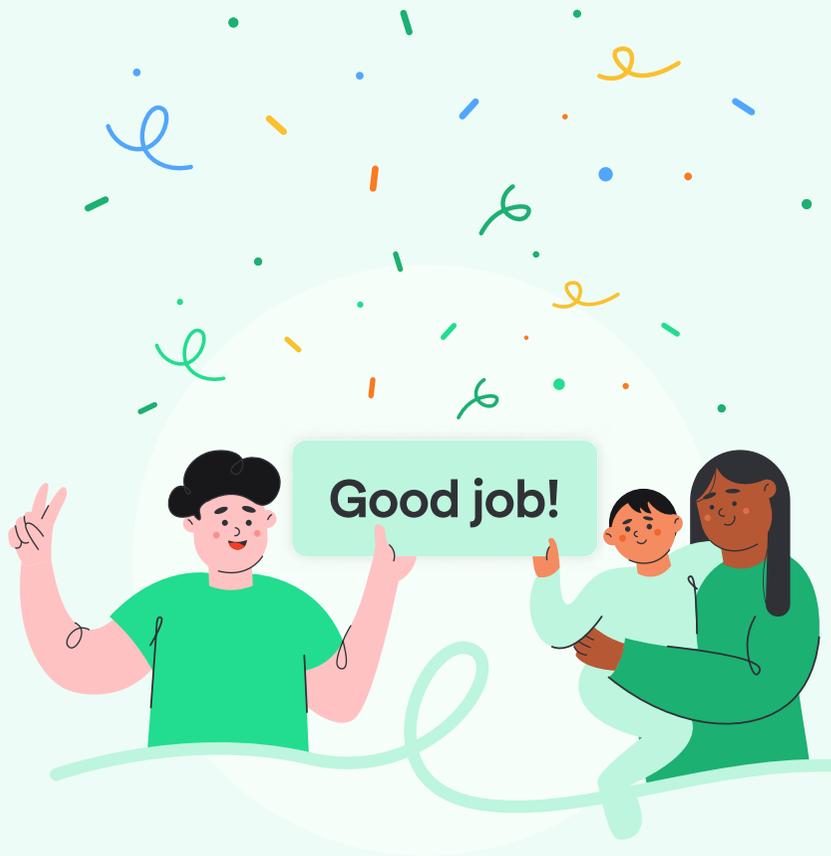
Behaviour and Attitudes



Behaviour and Attitudes

Ofsted Inspectors will consider how children display behaviour and attitudes through the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning.

It's important to remember, it's not about children being regulated all the time, and inspectors won't penalise settings for instances of children becoming dysregulated. The focus is on ensuring practitioners have effective approaches to support the development of self-regulation in all children.



Grade descriptors for behaviour and attitudes: Outstanding

The provider meets all the criteria for good behaviour and attitudes securely and consistently. Behaviour and attitudes in this provision are exceptional.

In addition, the following apply:

- Children have consistently high levels of respect for others. They increasingly show high levels of confidence in social situations. They confidently demonstrate their understanding of why behaviour rules are in place and recognise the impact that their behaviour has on others.
- Children are highly motivated and are very eager to join in, share and cooperate with each other. They have consistently positive attitudes to their play and learning.
- Children demonstrate high levels of self-control and consistently keep on trying hard, even if they encounter difficulties. When children struggle with this, leaders and practitioners take intelligent, swift and highly effective action to support them.

[The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted](#)

A flexible schedule

If you're doing something and the children are really engaged, don't stop for 'lunch time'. Lunch can wait. We don't tend to have strict routines and you need to have that because that's when the most amazing moments happen.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nursery

Inevitably young children do become dysregulated

We often hear concerns from people asking if they'll be downgraded because children misbehave. We're clear in our framework that we're talking about young children here, and what we're interested in is how adults support children in developing their behaviour.



Wendy Ratcliff, HMI, Ofsted

The whole picture

You need to know what's going on in the rest of your children's lives, not just in these four walls with you. Because everything that goes on outside affects what happens inside the setting with you.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery



Top tip: Outstanding practice

The inspector told the practitioner that she'd like to do the observation and at the time the children were happily playing outside. The activity that the staff member had planned was inside but the children were engrossed in their learning and challenging themselves. The practitioner turned around to the inspector and said 'I don't feel comfortable pulling the child away from an activity that they are engrossed in and learning from in order to do a different activity. Can you observe me now?' The child was just drawing with chalk on the floor. It was a really simple activity but because she'd said she didn't want to disturb the child's learning, the inspector said that was amazing and told us it was outstanding. A simple activity was enough.



Lizzy Barlow & Becky Pike
Nursery Group Leader Director, Hollies Day Nurseries

It's time for better nursery management software

See how easy it is to use Famly by signing up for a free demo today:

famly.co/demo



The screenshot displays the Famly software interface. On the left is a vertical navigation sidebar with icons for Home, Overview, Children, Staff, Reports, and Settings. The main content area is titled 'Home' and 'Family Home'. It features a 'Good morning, Lauren' greeting and a 'Nursery overview' table. Below the table are two financial summary cards: 'Revenue this month' showing 24 payments made with a 4% increase, and 'Debt this month' showing 12 overdue balance with a 12% decrease. A 'What's this?' help button is visible in the top right.

Room name	Children	Signed-in	Expected
Infants	+20		
Toddlers	+18		
Preschool	+5		

Revenue this month: 24 payments made (↑ 4%)

Debt this month: 12 overdue balance (↓ 12%)

CHAPTER 06

Personal development



Personal development

Personal Development focuses on how your provision supports children's all-around progress in relation to their age and current stage of development. Inspectors consider whether practitioners offer a rich variety of learning experiences to promote understanding, emotional literacy and learning.



Grade descriptors for personal development: Outstanding

The provider meets all the criteria for good personal development securely and consistently. Personal development in this provision is exceptional.

In addition, the following apply:

- The provider goes beyond the expected and is highly successful at giving children a rich set of experiences that promote an understanding of, and respect for, people, families and communities beyond their own. Opportunities for all children to develop their talents and interests are of exceptional quality.
- The provider ensures that these rich experiences are planned in a coherent way in the curriculum and they considerably strengthen the provider's offer.
- The way the provider goes about developing children's character is exemplary and is worthy of being shared with others.

[The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted](#)

A children's nursery association

We've had a parents' nursery association for some time, but we wanted to open it up to the children too. It gives them the floor to really open up about their nursery experience. Every few weeks, the manager will sit down with different groups of children from each setting and ask them what they'd like to change or anything new they'd like. It gives us so much insight into how tuned in the children are to changes.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

Children's interests

We didn't get asked anything about the EYFS last time. It's more about the children's interests and what inspires them and how you keep them engaged. As long as you can show that they are making progress in line with the EYFS, it's more about how you're helping them towards that progress and keeping them engaged.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Confidence in children's choices

We've introduced a voting system for all our children aged two and above. When we do a collaborative project with the children, we ask them to vote on decisions, so they can give their opinion. We want to encourage the children to learn to offer their opinion in a healthy and appropriate way.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

A passion for supporting children

When people have a passion for what they do you can't teach that and you can't force that, however much you might try. When your team naturally has that, they'll articulate it. Our feedback from the inspector was that it was clear that the leadership and management have so much passion for what we do. We hire people who care so much about the children's lives and helping them to develop.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Children's rights

It's all about the 'why'. Why do we get down on a child's level and ask if we can change their nappy? Why take them one at a time when it would be quicker to take a group? Because of what we believe about respecting children and their rights. We always keep going back to that.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls



Top tip: The children's interests are paramount

A while ago, I walked into one of our rooms and one of my team had added this giant, plastic castle. I said, "Oh my gosh that's awful! You can't have that when Ofsted comes!" But she said, "No, the children love it. I will tell the Ofsted inspector that these children thoroughly enjoy it and all the benefits it brings." When Ofsted came, the castle was there, and it's still there now!



Joanne Routledge
Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

CHAPTER 07

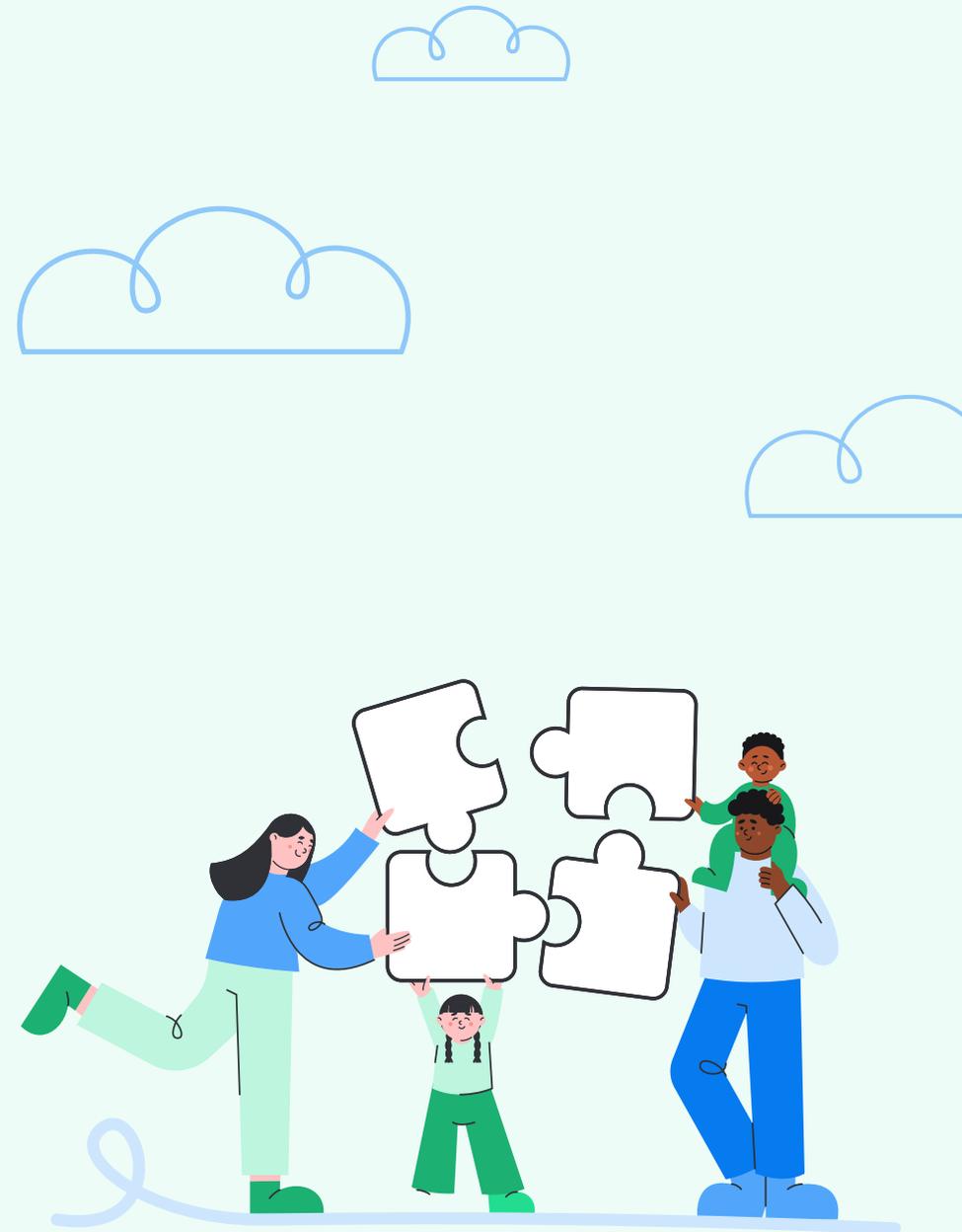
Leadership and Management



Leadership and Management

Outstanding leadership is all about how well you guide your provision, educate and care for children, and inspire your team of educators. With so much responsibility, early years leadership and management require a supportive and effective team, just as staff need strong leadership to do their best.

Here, our outstanding contributors offer their leadership and management advice.



Grade descriptors for leadership and management: Outstanding

The provider meets all the criteria for good leadership and management securely and consistently. Leadership and management in this provision is exceptional.

In addition, the following apply:

- Leaders ensure that they and practitioners receive focused and highly effective professional development. Practitioners' subject, pedagogical content and knowledge consistently builds and develops over time, and this consistently translates into improvements in the teaching of the curriculum.
- Leaders ensure that highly effective and meaningful engagement takes place with staff at all levels and that any issues are identified. When issues are identified – in particular about workload – they are consistently dealt with appropriately and quickly.
- Staff consistently report high levels of support for well-being issues.

Practice embedded from the top

Our inspector didn't speak a lot to the apprentices or educators or question them much. We asked, in a roundabout way, if she'd like to speak more to some of our educators, but she explained that she wanted to see that our passion, knowledge, and skills are embedded in our practice, as leaders and managers. Because we're training the educators and apprentices, if we weren't getting it right, what hope would the team have? If we don't know it, how would they know it?



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Developing confident staff

I take a bottom-up approach as I want to develop the practitioners to be confident. I don't want to be sitting in an office saying, "You must do this!" - it doesn't work and can create problems.



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

We really work hard on having a democratic culture and involving staff as much as possible in decisions and change. We want everyone to be part of the process.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

Supporting the team

One of our educators asked me what would happen if the inspector asked her something and she didn't know the answer, could we help? As the manager, I was with the inspector all day anyway, but of course you can support your team - that's what we're here for. For the team, they can see we're present so they don't feel abandoned!



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

We have a motto that we want our team to 'live well' so we ask ourselves, as a leadership team, what can we do day-to-day to look after our staff? We put a staff representative in place to gather feedback from the team about things that could improve their experience working here. It gives a voice to the team.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Talk to Outstanding settings

If you're a setting and you're not outstanding, phone a setting who is. People are so happy to share their information. They're not in it to make money or just to be the best. What matters is the children. So if you have a setting down the road who is outstanding, go and ask to see how they do things.



Becky Pike & Lizzy Barlow, Director and Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

All about communication

Treat your team with respect and have open and honest lines of communication. It is all about communication. You've got to make the time to speak to them on a daily basis. Ask them what they're doing over the weekend. Take the time to be interested in them, personally. It sounds common sense but it matters. Remember who is important in their lives, like a partner, parents, or pets and ask after them. That's key in any organisation.



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

Feedback from staff

The inspector asked a couple of members of staff about the leadership and management team and how we'd grown as a setting. We'd had a lot of change, with me being a new manager and a new deputy too, but luckily, things were going well. We told the inspector that, but she wanted to hear it from the staff too. She asked how my deputy and I worked together and who supported us. She wanted to hear first-hand from the team how we support them day-to-day.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Staying ready

We do semi-regular 'mocksted' inspections and regular audits, like our Pedagogy and Practice Audit. We unpick all of our practice and our environment termly, and we have clear expected behaviours, so we know we're always on our A game. We discuss safeguarding at every supervision meeting. The night before Ofsted, the team aren't expected to suddenly know everything - it's already embedded in their practice.



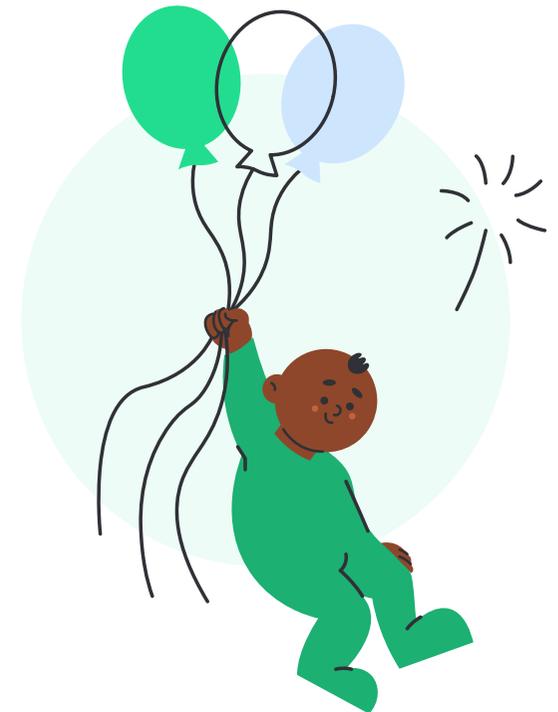
Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls Southwater

And when things go wrong?

If you like telling people off, this isn't the business to be in. If something goes wrong it should feel as upsetting to you as it does to them.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery



Accountability

Staff understand that they have a part to play in the success of the setting and in each new initiative we take on. The expectations are clear. While expectations for staff are high, they must be reflected in the expectations of leadership - you can't just sit behind a desk and tell your team to do something better. We as leaders want to do everything we can, too.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

Top tip: Outstanding staff meetings

These are the first three things the team at Cotswold Montessori discuss at every meeting to ensure that all staff are on top of the latest safeguarding issues and risks. It means they are prepared for Ofsted to come at any time.

1

Are there any safeguarding issues that we need to address?

2

Risk assessments: is there anything that we need to change or anything new that isn't working?

3

Are there any early help concerns? That's a level down from safeguarding and it's about spotting early warning signs. For example, it could be parents who are struggling.



Ailsa Monk

Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Top tip: Outstanding staff meetings

At any staff meeting, if everybody agrees on something, then it's somebody's designated job to disagree. They need to find an argument against it and play devil's advocate. Funnily enough, that argument can often win out, because being able to take a completely different view of something can often come up with the best answers. We call that The Tenth Man. I think it came from a film! It's just a great way of questioning stuff.

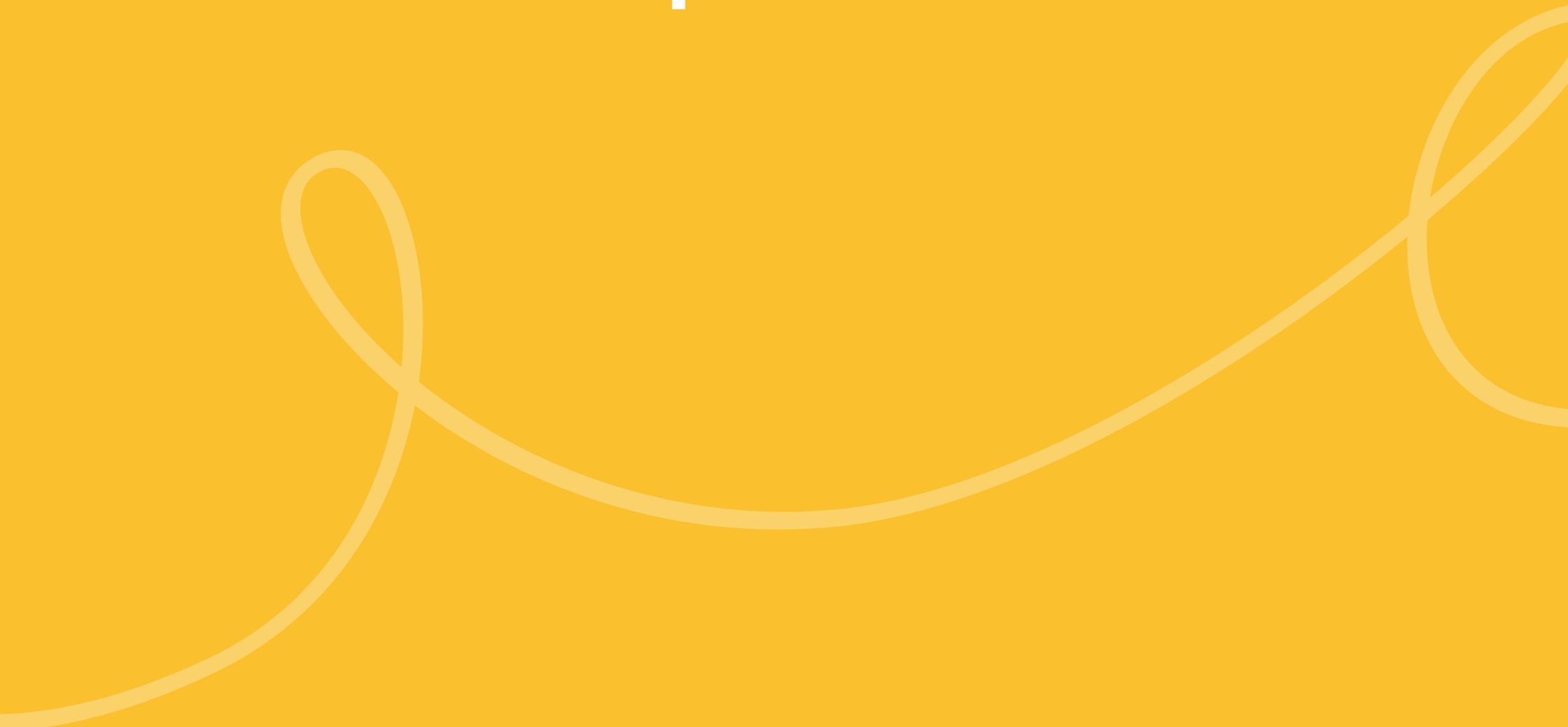


Lizzy Barlow & Becky Pike

Nursery Group Leader Director, Hollies Day Nurseries

CHAPTER 08

Staff Development





Staff Development

While Ofsted cover this under the Leadership and Management judgement, everyone we spoke to thought that staff training and development was the number one thing to invest in at any setting.

Try a 'mocksted' inspection

Back when I was a deputy manager, at our Farlington site, we ran a "mocksted" (mock Ofsted) inspection where two of our senior management, were the inspectors. I hadn't had any experience yet with Ofsted, as a manager, so it was really useful. We practiced joint observations and it reminded me to really explain why we do what we do thoroughly. When you know your own setting so well, you can forget that the inspector doesn't.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Performance management

I give every member of staff a sheet with maybe 50 statements on, and get them to rate themselves on a scale of 1-5. This means they're not scared about performance management, because they already know what we're going to discuss, and if they're honest with themselves, they also know what I'm going to say and they can prepare for it.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Admitting you're wrong

To have a situation where staff don't cover up anything, you have to have a framework in which it's safe to say when you've gone wrong.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Worth the investment?

We're passionate about staff training and it's all focused on what the children's needs are. It costs a lot of money to train staff, but the investment has been second to none. If we hadn't done it then we wouldn't be where we are now.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery

Training and development

You've got to have trust in your staff team, so give them opportunities to upskill and attend training. Whether it's a level 3 qualification or a short course online. You have to look at their skillset and where they might benefit.



Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

People often ask us, "How do you hire a motivated and qualified team?" Well, the short answer is, we don't. There isn't a pool of staff out there waiting to be hired, let alone qualified staff. We hired our team because we knew they were good but we have a very realistic training and induction process. We have clear expectations of the team at every level.



Charlotte Bateman, Managing Director, Little Barn Owls

Observing practice and feeding back

We observe our staff daily so when the inspector and I did the joint observation of an educator, it didn't faze them. When we had the discussion afterwards, the inspector wanted to check if I'd noticed the same things she had, and if the educator also felt the same. It was about consistency.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Strengths vs weaknesses

You've got to identify people's strengths but don't necessarily try to develop their weaknesses. There is no point - because you're just giving them a job that they don't want to do. Let them use their passion to share with others who want to improve.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Taking staff ideas on board

We have such an excellent long-standing staff team because we take their ideas on board. We listen to their ideas, worries, and concerns and I hope they feel valued by us doing so.



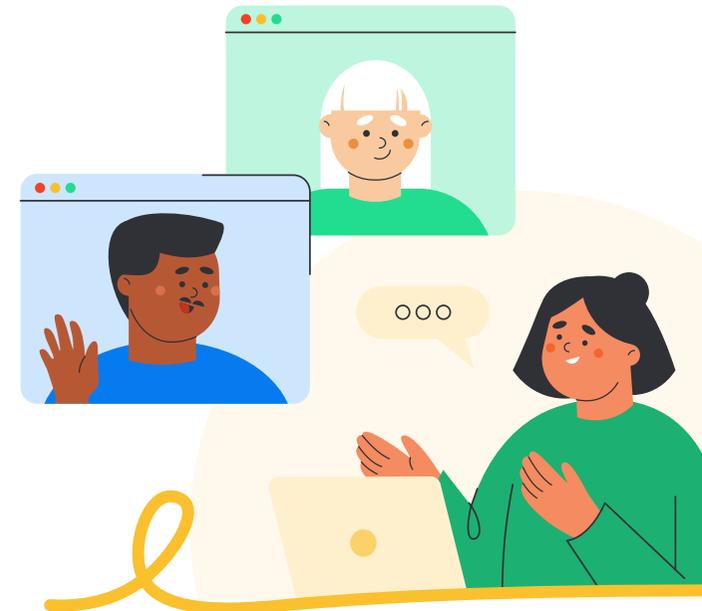
Joanne Routledge, Owner and Manager, Kinder Park Nursery

Competency and attitude

We use a competency framework that runs in levels to assess our staff. It's more about passion and talent than qualifications. Kind of like a learning journey. Within that we use the kind of language that Ofsted wants you to know so that it's a part of the staff's whole process with us.

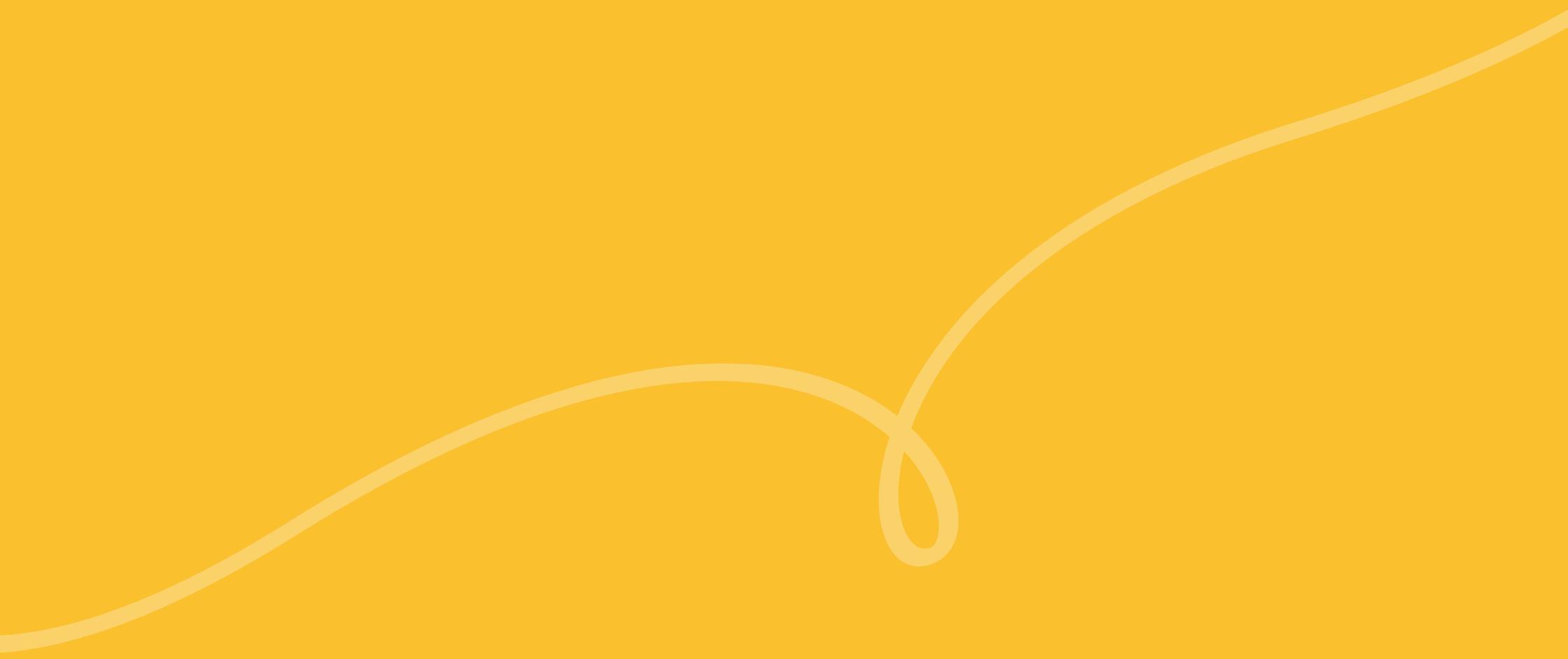


Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery



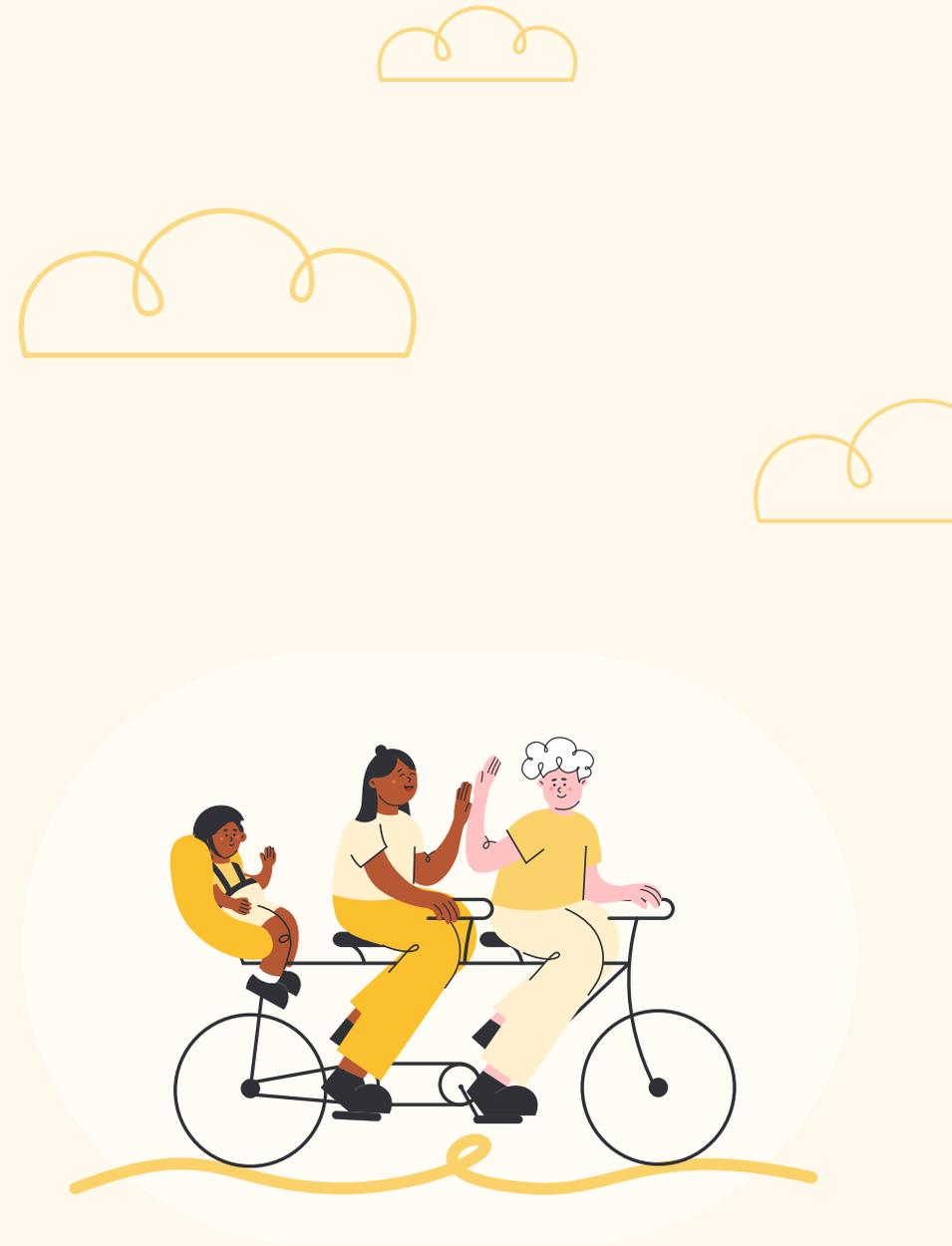
CHAPTER 09

Parent Partnerships



Parent Partnerships

Collaborative and transparent parent and carer partnerships are crucial in helping you to offer the very best education and care for every child. So what makes for outstanding parent and carer partnerships?



Meetings with parents

101. Wherever possible, the inspector must find out the views of parents during the inspection, including those of any parents who ask to speak to them. This will contribute to judgements about how well the provision works in partnership with parents to support children's learning and development, and the promotion of their well-being.

The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted

Daily diaries

Try to involve parents as much as possible in everything you do. Family has really helped with that, tracking sleep times and meal times, all the daily diary stuff. What they really want to know is all the amazing stuff we've done in the day and now they don't need to ask about the daily stuff because they can find out on Family.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Your biggest fan

If a parent loves you, then get them in and ask them why! Or get them to send an email or have a meeting about why they believe you're outstanding.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Parent questionnaires

We also do parent questionnaires based on the Ofsted primary school ones. We compile them for evaluation and we also have evidence to show Ofsted.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

Honesty is the best policy

Having a hugely trusting and confident relationship with parents allows you to have that difficult conversation. You mustn't say to them that their child has had a good day if they haven't. The language we use is "WE haven't had a good day." Because then it's about the practitioner taking on those emotions and trying to change it.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Partnerships for the parents, not the inspector

Charlotte quite often holds coffee mornings for parents where we have coffee out the front and some croissants and breakfast bars. But you can't just suddenly do something like that just for Ofsted, as it would be obvious. None of the parents commented about it, as it's something that happens once a week. The inspector can see it's something that happens consistently or not. But the main reason we do anything is for our families and children, not Ofsted.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Self Evaluation

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Self Evaluation

During the inspection, your inspector will sit with you to discuss your own assessment of how well you think your setting is doing. Based on what they observe during the day, they will make a judgement about how well you evaluate your own provision, including whether you take parents' and carers' views into account and how children's development informs your next steps.



Using the setting's own analysis of its strengths and weaknesses during the inspection

76. Leaders and managers of settings should have an accurate view of the quality of their provision and know what to improve. They do not need to produce a written self-evaluation but should be prepared to discuss the quality of education and care they provide – and how well they meet the needs of the children – with the inspector. Inspectors will consider how well leaders and managers evaluate their provision and know how they can improve it or maintain its high standards.

The early years inspection handbook, Ofsted

Organic self-evaluation

Our self-evaluation is very organic. If something stops being exciting because the children lose interest, then we address it next time we have an evaluation. We don't just keep bashing away at the same thing because people say that you should.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery

Use the available documentation

We, Ofsted, don't have anything that isn't publicly available. From the Inspection Handbook to the Education Inspection Framework, it's all available on the internet. That handbook really sets down what we're looking for, so you can use it as a guide.



Phil Minns, Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Ofsted

Who to include?

We include our children, our parents, our families, our environment, and local factors in our evaluation. You need to go outside the doors of your setting and see how the local factors change what you do.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery



No paperwork, please

The inspector didn't ask to see any paperwork about it or a development plan, but she asked several of the leadership team separately about our planned actions or improvements. She wanted to make sure it was embedded and that we all knew what we were working on.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Keeping it fresh

I find a working document is better as a self-evaluation because then it's not going to go out of date the minute you've finished it.



Ailsa Monk, Principal, Cotswold Montessori School

Development plans

There are always things to work on and always plans for staff, and we're really honest about that. It's useful for the Learning Walk to be able to say what each room are working on and how we're supporting, developing or training staff.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Top tip: Involving the parents

We let parents join in on the training with our staff if they want to, meaning they take on exactly the same early years training that our staff do. Then we do a survey each time afterwards to find out how the course went. Now we keep the flyers from those events, and get them to take questionnaires to show how we're developing the practice and looking at ways to improve.

That's the kind of evidence Ofsted liked to see.



Lizzy Barlow & Becky Pike
Nursery Group Leader Director, Hollies Day Nurseries

Top tips for inspection day

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Don't do anything just for Ofsted

Providers shouldn't be doing anything just for Ofsted. Everything providers do should be for the children. We're interested in what providers do to ensure children can learn and can do as much as possible.



Phil Minns, Senior His Majesty's Inspector for Early Curriculum, Ofsted

Don't fear the meeting at the end

It didn't feel like a negative experience throughout the day, just bracing ourselves for the meeting at the end. Our inspector reassured us that nothing would come as a shock - if she saw something she didn't like, she would feed back to me as we went. A few times throughout the day, she took me to one side to clarify the process around something so it wasn't the case that end the end, she suddenly told me all these negative things. It's not supposed to be an ambush, you're working together throughout the inspection.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

A positive mindset

We don't view it as Ofsted coming in to scrutinise us, we see it as our chance to show off the very best that we can do. We weren't thinking, "Oh no they'll come and pick everything apart," we were thinking, "If they have questions, we're confident enough in the way we do things to explain things articulately and reflect on our practice."



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Finding the answer

If you get put on the spot, just say "You know what, my mind's gone blank, can you give me a minute?" That's all you need to do - you don't need to have every answer every time.



Lizzy Barlow, Nursery Group Leader, Hollies Day Nurseries

The inspector isn't there to nit-pick

Ofsted know that is a nursery, you're human and they are children - nothing ever goes completely to plan! For example, we had some paperwork up on the wall with the previous month's date on and she asked us, "Would you like to print out the most up-to-date version?" We did and put it up and that was it. She didn't just put a red mark in her notebook and keep that to herself.



Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

Feedback to staff

Throughout the day, we were able to say to staff, "It's ok, just relax, this is what she's picking up on and you're doing a great job. She loved this and that's what we can work on more." It's working together.



Kerry Smith, Group Head of Children and Adults' Education, Little Barn Owls

Your time to shine

The inspector said, this is your time to shine. Because it is your time to shine. Do what you're good at.



Becky Pike, Director, Hollies Day Nursery

Don't add anything new for inspection day

You can't put on a fake front as Ofsted will see straight through it. You don't want the inspector to ask an educator, "Why are you preparing the snack like that?", to have the educator answer, "Well, my manager told me to last night!" It's got to be embedded in your day-to-day practice.

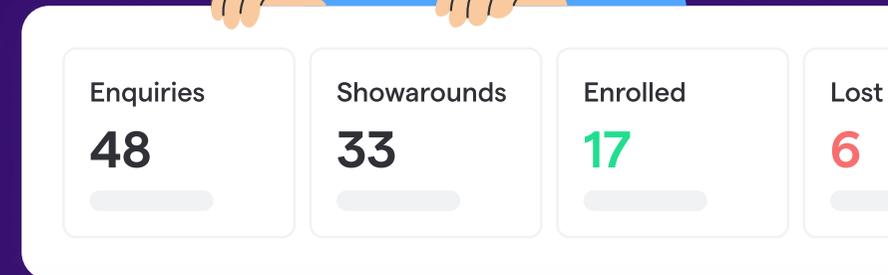


Charlotte Moss, Manager, Little Barn Owls Southwater

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Room name	Staff	Signed-in
★ Infants	+9	12

Name	Total	01 Apr	02 Apr
Claire	0h 0m 21h 45m	✓ 09:00 - 15:30	⚠ 06:30 - 11:45

Chris Miller	Holiday	Approve
		Approve