



# EARLY YEARS INSPECTION HANDBOOK

## **Part 2. The evaluation schedule – how early years settings will be judged**

Taken from the EY Inspection Handbook  
Early years inspection handbook - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

## Background to the evaluation schedule

166. The evaluation schedule must be used in conjunction with the guidance set out in part 1 of this document, [‘How we will inspect early years providers’](#), and part 3 [‘Applying the EIF in different contexts’](#), and in the EIF.

167. The evaluation schedule is not exhaustive. It does not replace the professional judgement of inspectors. Inspectors must interpret grade descriptors in relation to children’s age, development and stage of education.

168. In line with the EIF, inspectors will make the following judgements:

- overall effectiveness
- the quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management

169. The criteria for each of these judgements are drawn from Ofsted’s inspection experience, areas of consensus in academic research, and research that Ofsted has itself undertaken (see [‘Education inspection framework: overview of research’](#)).

170. Inspectors use a 4-point scale to make all judgements.

- grade 1: outstanding
- grade 2: good
- grade 3: requires improvement
- grade 4: inadequate

171. Inspectors must use their professional judgement to interpret and apply the grade descriptors to the setting they are inspecting. In doing so, they consider the following factors:

- a childminder who has only a very small number of children
- settings in which only babies and very young children are present
- settings that provide for funded 2-year-olds or groups who may be disadvantaged
- settings that have children who receive their main EYFS experience elsewhere
- children who are no longer in the early years age range

172. Inspectors must note any differences in the quality of education for children of different ages. [\[footnote 13\]](#) They will use their professional judgement and take into account all their evidence and give clear reasons for their judgements.

173. Inspectors will always seek to understand any ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on providers and will take this into account when reaching final inspection judgements.

174. We recognise that the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic may have impacted on what children know, remember and can do. Children may have a wider than usual range of starting points and gaps in their knowledge. Inspectors will pay close attention to how providers are identifying and addressing these delays and

gaps and what they are doing to address any disruption to learning, to ensure that children are well prepared for their next stage of education.

## **Reaching a judgement of outstanding**

175. 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.

## **Reaching a judgement of good, requires improvement or inadequate**

176. When considering a judgement of good or requires improvement inspectors will consider whether the overall quality of the provision is most closely aligned to the descriptions they set out. Inspectors are likely to reach a judgement of inadequate under a particular judgement if one or more of the inadequate criteria applies.

## **Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision**

177. Inspectors must use all their evidence to evaluate what it is like to be a child in the provision. In making their judgements about a provider's overall effectiveness, inspectors will consider whether the standard of education and care is good. If it meets all the criteria for good, then inspectors will consider whether it is outstanding. If it is not good, then inspectors will consider whether it requires improvement or is inadequate.

178. In judging the overall effectiveness, inspectors will take account of the 4 judgements. They will also make a judgement about the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding children.

179. Inspectors should take account of all the judgements made across the evaluation schedule. In particular, they should consider:

- the extent to which leaders and providers plan, design and implement the EYFS curriculum
- the extent to which the curriculum and care practices that the setting provides meet the needs of the range of children who attend, particularly children with SEND

- the progress children make in their learning and development relative to their starting points, and their readiness for the next stage of their education
- 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 fully met and there is a shared understanding of and responsibility for protecting children
- the effectiveness of leadership and management in evaluating practice and securing continuous development that improves children's education

## **Grade descriptors for the provision's overall effectiveness**

### **Outstanding (1)**

- 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.

### **Good (2)**

- The quality of education is at least good.
- All other judgements are likely to be good or outstanding. In exceptional circumstances, one of the judgement areas may require improvement, as long as there is convincing evidence that it is improving it rapidly and securely towards good.
- Safeguarding is effective.

### **Requires improvement (3)**

- Where one or more aspects of the provision's work requires improvement, the overall effectiveness is likely to require improvement.
- Safeguarding is effective.
- If there are any breaches of EYFS requirements, they do not have a significant impact on children's safety, well-being or learning and development.

### **Inadequate (4)**

The provision's overall effectiveness is likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following apply.

- Safeguarding is ineffective.
- Any one of the judgements is inadequate.
- Breaches of EYFS requirements have a significant impact on the safety and well-being and/or the learning and development of the children.
- It has been given 2 previous 'requires improvement' judgements and it is still not good.

# Quality of education

## The EYFS curriculum

180. The EYFS (educational programmes) provides the curriculum framework that leaders build on to decide what they intend children to learn and develop. [footnote](#)

<sup>141</sup> Leaders and practitioners decide how to implement the curriculum so that children make progress in the 7 areas of learning. Leaders and practitioners evaluate the impact of the curriculum by checking what children know and can do.

## Curriculum flexibility

181. Some providers offer a specialist early years curriculum and Ofsted recognises their autonomy to do so. For example, they may follow a specific philosophical or pedagogical approach or reflect a particular faith. The choice of teaching methods is a decision for providers, within the confines of the EYFS. Alongside any specialist education provided, it is important that children have access to a highly ambitious, broad and rich curriculum.

182. When reaching a judgement on quality of education, inspectors will work with leaders and managers to understand how the curriculum as a whole is structured, and where they can find evidence that the quality of education criteria are met.

183. The inspector will judge fairly those providers that take radically different approaches to the curriculum and will judge the quality of the provision in relation to the impact it has on children's learning, development and well-being. Inspectors will assess any provider's curriculum favourably when leaders and managers have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing and have implemented it effectively. They are, however, likely to assess it negatively where the specialist curriculum has been designed or is being delivered in a way that limits children's opportunities or fails to prepare them for life in modern Britain.

184. Inspectors will evaluate how well:

- leaders assure themselves that the setting's curriculum (educational programmes) intentions are met and it is appropriately ambitious for the children it serves
- leaders use additional funding, including the early years pupil premium where applicable, and measure its impact on disadvantaged children's outcomes
- practitioners ensure that the content and sequencing for each of the areas of learning are clear, allowing children to progress towards appropriately ambitious outcomes
- children develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills across the areas of learning
- the provider's curriculum prepares children for their next stage

185. Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

## **Cultural capital**

186. Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success. [\[footnote 15\]](#) It is about giving children the best possible start to their early education. As part of making a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider how well leaders use the curriculum to enhance the experience and opportunities available to children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

187. Some children arrive at an early years settings with different experiences from others, in their learning and play. What a setting does, through its EYFS curriculum and interactions with practitioners, potentially makes all the difference for children. It is the role of the setting to help children experience the awe and wonder of the world in which they live, through the 7 areas of learning.

## **Grade descriptors for the quality of education**

188. Inspectors will not grade curriculum intent, implementation and impact separately. Instead, inspectors will reach a single graded judgement for the quality of education, drawing on all the evidence they have gathered, using their professional judgement.

189. To reach a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors must use their professional judgement to consider the ages, development and stages of children in the setting.

190. In order for the quality of education to be judged outstanding, it must meet all of the good criteria securely and consistently. It must also meet all the outstanding criteria.

### **Outstanding (1)**

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.

191. Inspectors will use their professional judgement and adopt a 'best fit' approach in order to judge whether an early years provider is good or requires improvement.

## **Good (2)**

- Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give children, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.
- The provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced. It builds on what children know and can do, towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for their future learning.
- The provider has the same ambitions for almost all children. For children with particular needs, such as those with SEND, their curriculum is still ambitious and meets their needs.
- Children benefit from meaningful learning across the EYFS curriculum.
- Practitioners understand the areas of learning they teach and the way in which young children learn. Leaders provide effective support, including for staff with less experience and knowledge of teaching.
- Practitioners present information clearly to children, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter being taught. They communicate well to check children's understanding, identify misconceptions and provide clear explanations to improve their learning. In so doing, they respond and adapt their teaching as necessary.
- Practitioners ensure that their own speaking, listening and reading of English enables children to hear and develop their own language and vocabulary well. They read to children in a way that excites and engages them, introducing new ideas, concepts and vocabulary.
- Over the EYFS, teaching is designed to help children remember long-term what they have been taught and to integrate new knowledge into larger concepts.
- Practitioners and leaders use assessment well to check what children know and can do to inform teaching. This includes planning suitable activities, providing opportunities for children to practise and responding to specific needs. Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and avoid unnecessary burdens for staff or children.
- Practitioners and leaders create an environment that supports the intent of an ambitious and coherently planned and sequenced curriculum. The

available resources meet the children's needs and promote their focus on learning.

- Practitioners share information with parents about their child's progress in relation to the EYFS. They help parents to support and extend their child's learning at home, including how to encourage a love of reading.
- Children develop detailed knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning and use these in an age-appropriate way. Children develop their vocabulary and understanding of language across the EYFS curriculum.
- Children are ready for the next stage of education, especially school, where applicable. They have the knowledge and skills they need to benefit from what school has to offer when it is time to move on.
- Children enjoy, listen attentively and respond with comprehension to familiar stories, rhymes and songs that are appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Children understand securely the early mathematical concepts appropriate to their age and stage that will enable them to move on to the next stage of learning.
- Children articulate what they know, understand and can do in an age-appropriate way, holding thoughtful conversations with adults and their friends.
- From birth onwards, children are physically active in their play, developing their physiological, cardiovascular and motor skills. They show good control and coordination in both large and small movements appropriate for their stage of development.

### **Requires improvement (3)**

- Provision is not good.
- Any breaches of the statutory requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development.

### **Inadequate (4)**

The quality of education is likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following applies.

- A poorly designed and implemented curriculum does not meet children's needs. The needs of babies and young children are not met.
- Practitioners have a poor understanding of the areas of learning they teach and the way in which young children learn.
- Assessment is overly burdensome. It is unhelpful in determining what children know, understand and can do.
- Children are not well prepared for school or the next stage of their learning, particularly those who are in receipt of additional funding. Strategies for engaging parents are weak and parents do not know what their child is learning or how they can help them improve.
- Breaches of the statutory requirements have a significant impact on children's learning and development.

## Behaviour and attitudes

192. Inspectors will consider the ways in which the provider's curriculum supports children to develop their attitudes and behaviour through the characteristics of effective learning:

- playing and exploring
- active learning
- creating and thinking critically

193. Although attendance at the setting is not mandatory, inspectors will explore how well providers work with parents to promote children's attendance so that the children form good habits for future learning. In particular, inspectors will consider the attendance of children for whom the provider receives early years pupil premium.

194. Inspectors will consider the extent to which leaders and practitioners support children's behaviour and attitudes, including how the provision helps children to manage their own feelings and behaviour, and how to relate to others.

195. To reach a judgement about children's behaviour and attitudes, inspectors must use their professional judgement to consider the ages, development and stages of children in the setting.

## Grade descriptors for behaviour and attitudes

196. In order for behaviour and attitudes to be judged outstanding, it must meet all of the good criteria securely and consistently. It must also meet all the outstanding criteria.

### Outstanding (1)

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.

197. Inspectors will use their professional judgement and adopt a 'best fit' approach in order to judge whether a provider is good or requires improvement.

### **Good (2)**

- The provider has high expectations for children's behaviour and conduct. These expectations are commonly understood and applied consistently and fairly. This is reflected in children's positive behaviour and conduct. They are beginning to manage their own feelings and behaviour and to understand how these have an impact on others. When children struggle with regulating their behaviour, leaders and practitioners take appropriate action to support them. Children are developing a sense of right and wrong.
- The provider's curriculum supports children to build positive attitudes to learning. Children demonstrate their positive attitudes to learning through high levels of curiosity, concentration and enjoyment. They listen intently and respond positively to adults and each other. Children are developing their resilience to setbacks and take pride in their achievements.
- Children benefit fully from the early education opportunities available to them by participating and responding promptly to requests and instructions from practitioners.
- Relationships among children, parents and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture. Children feel safe and secure.

### **Requires improvement (3)**

- Children's behaviour and attitudes are not good.
- Any breaches of the statutory requirements do not have a significant impact on children's behaviour and attitudes.

### **Inadequate (4)**

Children's behaviour and attitudes are likely to be inadequate if one or both of the following apply.

- Children's behaviour and attitudes to learning are poor. Their frequent lack of engagement in activities and/or poor behaviour lead to a disorderly environment that hinders children's learning and/or puts them and others at risk.
- Children persistently demonstrate poor self-control and a lack of respect for others, leading to children not feeling safe and secure.

## Personal development

198. Inspectors will evaluate the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting children's personal development. Inspectors must use their professional judgement to consider the effectiveness of the provision on children's all-round development. In doing so, inspectors must be mindful of the ages and stages of development of the children in the setting.

## Grade descriptors for personal development

199. In order for personal development to be judged outstanding, it must meet all of the good criteria securely and consistently. It must also meet all the outstanding criteria.

### Outstanding (1)

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.

200. Inspectors will use their professional judgement and adopt a 'best fit' approach in order to judge whether an early years provider is good or requires improvement.

### Good (2)

- The curriculum and the provider's effective care practices promote and support children's emotional security and development of their character. Children are gaining a good understanding of what makes them unique.
- The curriculum and the provider's effective care practices promote children's confidence, resilience and independence. Practitioners teach children to take appropriate risks and challenges as they play and learn both inside and outdoors, particularly supporting them to develop physical and emotional health.
- A well-established key person system helps children form secure attachments and promotes their well-being and independence. Practitioners teach children the language of feelings, helping them to appropriately develop their emotional literacy (see the relevant [Statutory](#)

[framework for the early years foundation stage](#), which set out the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) area of learning). Relationships between staff and babies are sensitive, stimulating and responsive.

- Practitioners provide a healthy diet and a range of opportunities for physically active play, both inside and outdoors. They give clear and consistent messages to children that support healthy choices around food, rest, exercise and screen time.
- Practitioners help children to gain an effective understanding of when they might be at risk, including when using the internet, digital technology and social media and where to get support if they need it.
- Practitioners ensure that policies are implemented consistently. Hygiene practices ensure that the personal needs of children of all ages are met appropriately. Practitioners teach children to become increasingly independent in managing their personal needs.
- Practitioners value and promote equality and diversity and prepare children for life in modern Britain. They do this in an age-appropriate way to help children to reflect on their differences and understand what makes them unique. Practitioners do this by: teaching children to be respectful and to recognise those who help us, and contribute positively to society; developing children's understanding of fundamental British values; developing children's understanding and appreciation of diversity; celebrating what we have in common; and routinely challenging stereotypical behaviours and promoting respect for different people.

### **Requires improvement (3)**

- Provision to support children's personal development is not good.
- Any breaches of the statutory requirements for safeguarding and welfare and/or learning and development do not have a significant impact on children's safety, well-being and personal development.

### **Inadequate (4)**

Personal development is likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following applies.

- Breaches of the statutory requirements have a significant impact on children's safety, well-being and personal development.
- Practitioners do not support children's social and emotional well-being or prepare them for transitions within the setting and/or to other settings and school.
- The key person system does not work effectively to support children's emotional well-being and children fail to form secure attachments with their carers. Babies are not stimulated.
- Policies, procedures and practice do not promote the health and welfare of children. As a result, children do not know how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
- Children have a narrow experience that does not promote their understanding of people and communities beyond their own or help them to recognise and accept each other's differences.

## Leadership and management

201. Inspectors will evaluate evidence from the range of different inspection activities set out in part 1 of the handbook when considering the effectiveness of leadership and management.

202. Inspectors will seek to understand how leaders have adapted their approaches as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the rationale for any new or modified ways of working.

## Grade descriptors for leadership and management

203. In order for leadership and management to be judged outstanding, it must meet all of the good criteria securely and consistently. It must also meet all the outstanding criteria.

### Outstanding (1)

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.

204. Inspectors will use their professional judgement and adopt a 'best fit' approach in order to judge whether an early years provider is good or requires improvement.

### Good (2)

- Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive care and education to all. This is realised through strong shared values, policies and practice.
- Leaders focus on improving practitioners' knowledge of the areas of learning and understanding of how children learn to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and appropriate use of assessment. The practice and subject knowledge of practitioners (including those who are newly qualified) build and improve over time. Leaders have effective systems in place for the supervision and support of staff.

- Leaders act with integrity to ensure that all children, particularly those with SEND, have full access to their entitlement to early education.
- Leaders engage effectively with children, their parents and others in their community, including schools and other local services.
- Leaders engage with their staff and are aware of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way they manage staff, including their workload, to avoid any unnecessary burdens.
- Those with oversight or governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. They have a clear vision and strategy and hold senior leaders to account for the quality of care and education. They ensure that resources are managed sustainably, effectively and efficiently.
- The provider fulfils its statutory duties, for example under the Equality Act 2010, and other duties, for example in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and safeguarding.
- Leaders protect staff from harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- Safeguarding is effective

### **Requires improvement (3)**

- Leadership and management are not yet good.
- Safeguarding is effective
- Any breaches of statutory requirements do not have a significant impact on children's safety, well-being or learning and development.

### **Inadequate (4)**

Leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following applies.

- Leaders do not have the capacity to improve the quality of education and care. Actions taken to tackle areas of identified weakness have been insufficient or ineffective. Training for staff is ineffective.
- Leaders are not doing enough to tackle the poor curriculum or teaching, or the inappropriate use of assessment. This has a significant impact on children's progress, particularly those who are disadvantaged, which includes those with SEND.
- Links with parents, other settings and professionals involved in supporting children's care and education do not identify or meet children's individual needs. Children fail to thrive.
- Leaders do not tackle instances of discrimination. Equality, diversity and British values are not actively promoted in practice.
- Safeguarding and welfare requirements are not met. Breaches have a significant impact on the safety and well-being of children.