

How OFSTED inspect.

(Taken from 'early years inspection handbook', Sep 2022)

The time spent on OFSTED inspection normally depends on the size of the provision. Most inspections are carried out by one inspector.

Inspectors will usually not arrive before 8am. When inspecting:

- group provision that operates only for restricted daily hours, the inspector will normally be present for about 4 hours
- group provision open for a full day, the inspector will normally be on site for at least 6 hours

The inspection may be carried out by more than one inspector or be carried out over more than one day, at the discretion of the region.

The start of the on-site inspection

On entering the setting, inspectors must introduce themselves and show the provider their Ofsted identification badge. The inspector must allow the provider time to check the identification (which is the main way to confirm identity) and to contact us to verify it, if they have any concerns. In group settings, the inspector must ensure that the provider has been informed of their arrival.

The inspector should meet the provider or representative briefly on arrival to confirm arrangements for the inspection, including:

- checking the accuracy of – or any changes to – the information about the setting
- gathering any information about staff absences, children on roll and other practical matters
- asking the provider to display the notice of inspection – if this has not already been done – so that parents are aware that an inspection is taking place
- agreeing the timetable for inspection activities, including a learning walk; joint observations; inspectors must offer the provider or their representative the opportunity to take part in joint observations and their response must be recorded
- making arrangements for a longer meeting at a convenient time with the provider or their representative to discuss the

setting's evaluation of the quality of provision and other matters relating to leadership and management

- making arrangements for providing feedback at the end of the inspection and, for group provision, requesting that the nominated individual or their representative is invited
- making arrangements to talk to parents – this may be almost immediately if parents are present – and to check that the provider has informed them about the inspection
- checking the number of staff and their qualifications and recording them in the evidence base

If the inspection is being carried out without notice, the inspector should refer to any concerns that have led to the inspection taking place. The inspector should be aware of the need to maintain confidentiality and to protect fully any sensitive information relating to complainants.

If there is more than one inspector, a short team meeting should clarify inspection activities, the areas to be explored initially and individual roles and responsibilities.

Gathering and recording evidence

During inspections, inspectors will usually carry out the following activities:

- joint observation
- observing children
- learning walk
- discussions with leaders/managers

These activities enable inspectors to gather evidence to make valid and reliable inspection judgements. These activities, part of our inspection methodology, are an effective way of finding out what it is like for a child at that setting. [Paragraphs 10 to 13](#) dispel common misconceptions about inspection that can result in unnecessary workload for providers.

Inspectors will evaluate evidence of the impact of the curriculum, including on the most disadvantaged children. Disadvantaged children

includes children with SEND ([see paragraph 46](#)). It also includes children who meet the criteria for the provider to receive [early years pupil premium funding](#).

Inspectors must spend as much time as possible gathering evidence about the quality of care, teaching and learning by:

- observing the children at play
- talking to the children and practitioners about what they are learning from the activities and experiences provided
- talking to parents to gain their views on the quality of care and education provided
- observing the interactions between practitioners and children
- gauging children's levels of understanding and their engagement in learning
- talking to practitioners about their assessment of what children know and can do and how they are building on it
- observing care routines and how they are used to support children's personal development, including the setting's approach to toilet training
- evaluating the practitioners' knowledge of the EYFS curriculum

In group provision, the inspector must track a representative sample of 2 or more children across the inspection. The inspector should discuss with the provider what they intend the relevant children to learn and remember based on what those children know and can already do. The evidence collected must refer to:

- the practitioner's knowledge of each child
- the progress check for any children aged 2
- the impact of any early years pupil premium funding on the children's development
- the quality of support for any children with SEND
- the discussions held with each child's key person and how they decide what to teach
- how well children are developing in the prime and specific areas of learning that help them to be ready for their next stage of education, including school
- the reason why children may not receive their full entitlement to early education and the impact that has on them,

particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND

If any of the children are eligible for the early years pupil premium or subject to a child protection plan or child in need plan, at least one of them must be included in the sample of those tracked.

Inspectors must record their evidence clearly and succinctly. All sections of the evidence base must be completed before the end of the inspection. Inspectors may make handwritten notes, but these must be transferred to the electronic evidence as soon as possible after the end of the inspection. It is essential that the evidence accurately reflects discussions with staff and managers. Individuals can be named in inspection evidence if it is necessary to identify them and to avoid confusion. Inspectors should identify clearly any information that was provided in confidence.

The evidence underpinning the judgements and areas for improvement must be used to summarise the main points for feedback and to write the report.

The electronic evidence and any handwritten notes may be scrutinised for the purposes of retrieval or quality assurance monitoring or as a source of evidence in the event of a complaint or a Freedom of Information request.

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

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 inspector must meet the provider or their representative to discuss how they evaluate their practice. Normally, the discussion should be at a point in the inspection that gives the inspector enough time to follow up any matters discussed. To test the accuracy of the

setting's analysis, the inspector will observe children learning, staff caring and teaching, and the safety and suitability of the premises. The inspector will discuss how the provider evaluates the quality of its provision, checking whether they take account of the views of parents and the progress made by the children to determine what it needs to improve.

During the inspection, inspectors will use the information provided to test whether the provider's view of the quality of the setting is realistic and to gauge what needs to improve.

Observation and discussion

Inspectors must discuss with leaders and practitioners what they intend children to learn, know and do as a result of the EYFS curriculum they offer. They must follow this discussion through in their observations and discussions with children at play and staff interactions.

Inspectors must not advocate a particular method of planning, teaching or assessment. They must not look for a preferred methodology but must record aspects of teaching and learning that they observe to be effective and identify what needs to improve.

Inspectors will not analyse a provider's internal progress and attainment data during an inspection. This does not mean that providers cannot use data where they consider it appropriate. Inspectors will, however, put more focus on the curriculum and less on a provider's generation, analysis and interpretation of data. Leaders and managers have told us they believe this will help us play our part in reducing unnecessary workload. Inspectors will be interested in the conclusions drawn and actions taken from any internal assessment information, but they will not examine or verify that information first-hand. Inspectors will, however, ask providers to explain why they have decided to collect whatever assessment data they collect, what they are drawing from their data and how that informs their curriculum and teaching.

Inspectors do not expect to see documentation other than that set out in the EYFS. They will use the evidence gathered from discussions

and their own observations to help judge the overall quality of the curriculum provided for children.

Inspectors must spend most of the inspection time gathering first-hand evidence by observing the quality of the daily routines and activities of children and staff. These observations enable inspectors to judge the contribution practitioners make to children's learning, progress, safety and well-being. The observations should also enable them to collect sufficient evidence to support detailed and specific recommendations about improvements needed to the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management.

In group settings, inspectors should observe as many staff as possible to ensure that an accurate picture of the overall quality of interactions between practitioners and children can be gained.

When observing interactions between staff and children, inspectors should consider how well staff:

- engage in dialogue with children
- watch, listen and respond to children
- model language well
- read aloud and tell stories to children
- encourage children to sing songs, nursery rhymes and musical games
- encourage children to express their thoughts and use new words
- support independence and confidence
- encourage children to speculate and test ideas through trial and error
- enable children to explore and solve problems
- behave as an excellent role model for children
- support children to recognise and respond to their own physical needs
- attend to children's personal needs
- deal with children's care arrangements, including intimate care, the levels of privacy afforded to children and the supervision arrangements when undertaking personal hygiene tasks

Inspectors will also discuss children's learning and development with staff as part of the inspection. There will be a particular focus on communication and language, as the development of children's spoken language underpins all 7 areas of learning and development that are set out in [paragraph 1.6 of the statutory framework for the EYFS](#). Much of this will be through incidental conversations prompted by observing the children at play and the interactions between them and adults.

Where the quality of practice is weak, the inspector must talk to the provider about what has been observed. The inspector should also ask about any action the provider is taking to bring about improvement.

The inspector should always invite the provider or a nominated senior member of staff – such as the manager or early years professional – to take part in one or more joint observations of activities, care routines and/or scrutiny of the progress children make. If the provider declines the opportunity to take part in joint observations, this should be recorded in the evidence base, along with the reason given.

Joint observations should enable the inspector to:

- gain an insight into the effectiveness of the provision's professional development programme for practitioners
- learn about the provider's view of staff's interactions with children
- see the quality of the implementation of the curriculum/educational programmes
- consider how effectively the manager supports staff to promote the learning and development of all children

Following a joint observation, the inspector should discuss and note any similarities or differences between the provider's evaluation and their own.

During the inspection

The inspector will:

- observe the children at play

- talk to you and the children
- observe how you and the children interact
- check the children's levels of understanding and if they take part in learning
- talk to you about the children's knowledge, skills and abilities
- observe care routines and how they're used to support children's personal development
- evaluate your knowledge of the early years foundation stage

After the inspection

You'll be sent a report with your grade. You'll be told how to do better, if there's anything that can be improved.

You'll be graded as one of the following:

- Grade 1 - outstanding
- Grade 2 - good
- Grade 3 - requires improvement
- Grade 4 - inadequate