

# THE KEY ROLE OF STAFF IN PROVIDING QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

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# **THE KEY ROLE OF STAFF IN PROVIDING QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION**

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## FOREWORD

The early years of a child's life provide the foundations for future development and achievement. The quality of experiences in those early years is critical to how well children will be able to fulfil their lifelong potential.

Almost all 3 and 4 year old children in Scotland attend some form of pre-school education outwith their home. The quality of that education in Scotland provided by staff in pre-school centres is positive for most children but it can vary, leaving some children with a poorer experience and start to their education. The diverse range and level of qualifications and training of staff in the sector influences the quality of that education.

Where the quality is high, there is clear evidence from research<sup>1</sup> and inspection that children have increased chances of success in their primary education and reduced chances of problems with attainment, relationships and behaviour. Moreover, the benefits are experienced across the range of social advantage and disadvantage and persist even in the face of weaknesses in the quality of their experience in primary school.

This report looks at the relationship between the quality of provision offered to our young children and the qualifications and training of those adults working with them. It identifies the importance of high level qualifications and training in early education to effective leadership skills and the impact on the delivery of quality provision for children.

The connection is clear between well-qualified, reflective professionals and the high quality experiences for children. This report highlights the positive impacts of this connection. It also recommends areas for further improvement to support everyone involved in the work of educating pre-school children. The recommendations are in line with the national strategic direction of increasing teacher involvement and implementing professional graduate leadership for early years managers.



**Graham Donaldson**

Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector  
HM Inspectorate of Education

1 The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Guidance on the roles of teachers in pre-school education contained in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 came into force in 2002. The guidance, along with other regulatory measures, replaced the pre-school education provisions in the Schools (Scotland) Code 1956. The new provisions removed the statutory requirement to have a set ratio of one teacher to twenty children in nursery classes. The repeal gave local authorities greater flexibility in deploying teachers in pre-school centres.

The new guidance aimed to:

- identify and affirm the value of the contribution trained teachers made to the quality of experiences for children in pre-school education;
- set the involvement of teachers alongside the contributions of other staff and underline the importance of team working;
- identify ways in which teachers added value to the early education experience, both within and outwith the pre-school settings;
- identify key factors which made for successful integration of teachers within staff teams; and
- encourage authorities to consider carefully future staffing arrangements which reflected the interrelationships between care and education, and the need to provide flexible opportunities for the use of staff skills.

The guidance highlighted the increasingly important role of all staff involved in delivering pre-school education. It recognised that a new relationship was needed between teachers and staff with other qualifications, and the different roles teachers can play in making effective contributions in pre-school.

This report looks at the key and changing role played by staff in pre-school education and the implications for the quality of children's learning across the sector. It evaluates the different types of pre-school provision and the qualifications and backgrounds of teachers and other staff in relation to the quality of children's experiences. It also considers the training and deployment of teachers and other staff working in the pre-school sector. In the period covered by the report (2003 to 2006), teachers were the main degree-level professionals involved in delivering pre-school education. The report, therefore, focuses on the staff qualifications relating to the workforce at that time. As the level of qualifications of the workforce develops, including other degree-level qualifications, a different picture may emerge on the impact for children of a different mix of highly qualified professionals.

Evidence for this report was gathered from HMIE integrated inspections from 2003 to 2006 in local authority nursery schools, classes and family/children's centres, and partner centres in the private and voluntary sectors. Inspectors gathered information from visits to, and contact with, local authorities. Inspectors also drew from the following sources:

- HMIE's Improving Scottish Education Report (2006);
- Education Committee Early Years Enquiry: Executive Summary (2006);
- Report on the Integrated Inspection of Early Education and Childcare Services, which included an external review commissioned from Market Research UK (mruk), a firm of independent research consultants;
- National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce; and
- Research from the national longitudinal research, The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project.



## 2. EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

### Pre-school education

In Scotland, 3 and 4 year old children are entitled to free, part-time, pre-school education. National census information from 2006 showed 97.4% of all children entitled to this education were enrolled in pre-school centres.

### Pre-school centre

Throughout the report, the term pre-school centre covers the range of provision for children receiving free, part-time, pre-school education. It includes:

- local authority nursery classes;
- independent school nursery classes;
- local authority nursery schools;
- local authority family centres;
- privately run day nurseries; and
- voluntary playgroups.

Throughout the report, the following terms have been used to cover teachers and staff working in pre-school.

### Teacher

In this report, a teacher working in pre-school refers to a fully qualified teacher who has gained a degree qualification through a university and/or teacher education institute. Teachers in Scotland are an all-graduate profession.

The requirements for admissions for teachers in primary and nursery schools and classes are the same. Many teachers enter the teaching profession through a four-year course leading to a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. Others attain a first degree followed by a one-year Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) course. Both routes are at Level 10 in the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF). Entrants to teacher qualification courses need to have gained passes in English at Higher level (Grade C or above) and mathematics at Standard Grade (Grade 1 or 2), or equivalent. Teacher education courses provide teachers with a foundation in the professional skills needed in the general principles of teaching.

Teachers in local authorities in Scotland are required to register with the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS), initially meeting the standard for initial teacher education, and then the standard for full registration at the end of their probationary period. Additionally, they adhere to the Council's codes of practice.

## Nursery Nurse

Nursery nurse has been a term used generally for staff other than teachers working with young children in pre-school centres. A range of titles is now in use as well as nursery nurse, e.g. nursery assistant, early years educator, early education officer, pre-school worker. In this report the term nursery nurse is used to cover the variety of titles.

A range of qualifications can be undertaken by nursery nurses at different levels of achievement. Most widely held are the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Childcare and Education and the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) Level 3 and Level 2 in Early Years Care and Education. Staff can train in colleges or they can obtain their qualification through a vocational course at their place of work in a pre-school centre.

Those staff not trained as teachers and working in the early years sector providing day care of children service fall within the legislation laid down in the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was established by this act to be responsible for the regulation of the social services workforce and to develop their education and training. Included in the workforce which the SSSC regulates, are around 30000 early education and childcare workers who perform a variety of roles in a range of children's settings in Scotland. In 2006, the childcare workforce was required to register (and hold or be working towards a recognised qualification) with the SSSC. The SSSC published its qualification criteria for registration in March 2004. Day care of children service workers are split into three categories with three levels of qualifications all recognised within the SCQF.

- *Support worker*: an appropriate qualification at the minimum of SVQ Level 2, or equivalent
- *Practitioner*: an appropriate qualification at the minimum of SVQ Level 3, or equivalent
- *Manager/lead practitioner*: an appropriate qualification at the minimum of SVQ Level 4, or equivalent.<sup>2</sup>

By 2011, the criteria for registration of early years manager will be superseded by a new degree-level equivalent qualification.

## Notes on Findings and Recommendations

Throughout this report, key recommendations related to HMIE findings are highlighted in blue and enclosed in boxes, and are summarised again at the end of the report.

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed information on the levels of qualifications see [www.sssc.uk.com](http://www.sssc.uk.com)

### 3. EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

There are some 2500 centres in Scotland which provide part-time, funded pre-school education. HMIE have inspected these centres in collaboration with the Care Commission. The evidence in this section is taken mainly from evaluations of quality made by inspectors during the inspection of 1600 centres between 2003 and 2005. Evaluations were made against a four-point scale as follows:

- Very good : major strengths
- Good : strengths outweigh weaknesses
- Fair : some important weaknesses
- Unsatisfactory : major weaknesses

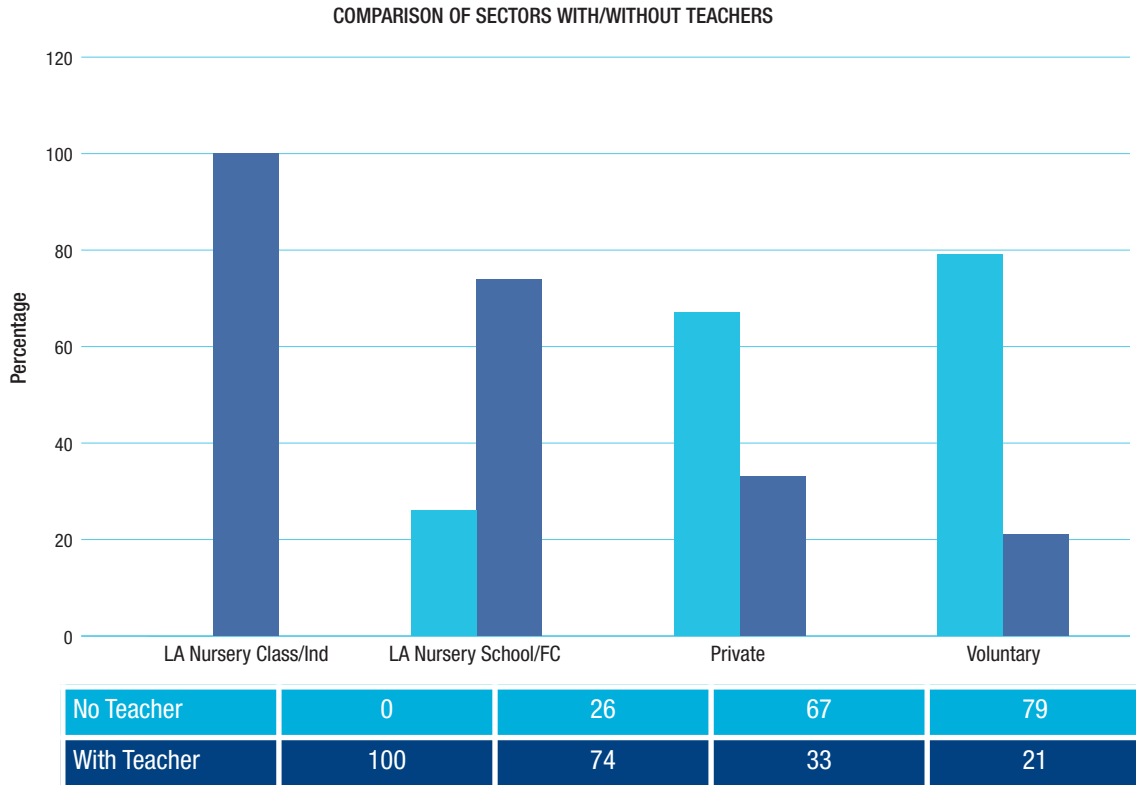
Analysis of HMIE evidence from these inspection reports identified clear patterns within the quality indicators.<sup>3</sup> Information was analysed in detail across all pre-school centres: local authority, independent, private and voluntary.

Inspectors compared the percentage of teachers employed across the range of pre-school centres. The information is set out in table 1 against each sector type. Teachers were employed in all local authority nursery schools and primary schools with nursery classes and independent school nursery classes. Tables 2b, 3b and 4b, therefore, have no entry for percentages without a teacher. Local authority family centre provision is included in the evaluations for nursery schools. These did not always have a teacher employed. In the majority of private and voluntary centres, no teachers were employed.

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<sup>3</sup> Detailed analysis was gathered against key quality indicators in the *Child at the Centre* for inspections between 2003 and 2005. More recent statistics from evaluations of inspection in 2006 continue to support the overall findings.

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES WITH AND WITHOUT TEACHERS BY SECTOR TYPE**

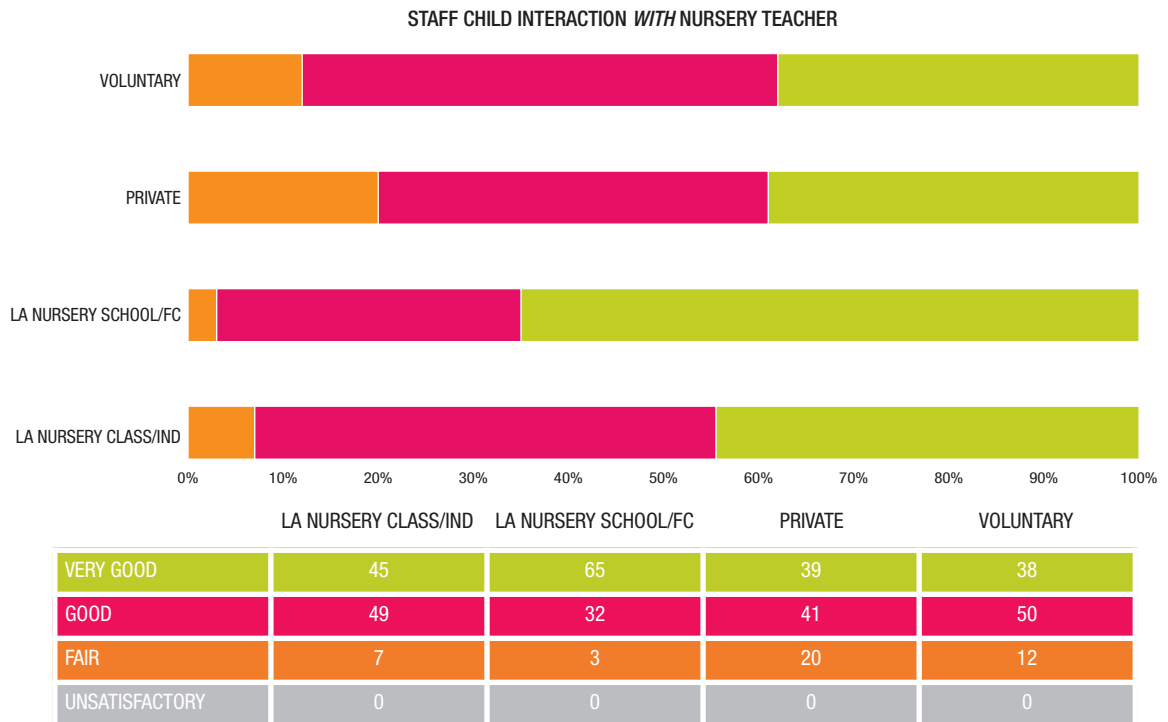


The data in tables 2a/b, 3a/b and 4a/b on the following pages provide detailed information on key quality indicators from inspections of different types of pre-school centres. They display evaluations of key quality indicators (staff/child interaction, meeting children’s needs, support for children with additional support needs, and leadership) separated into those centres with and without teachers.

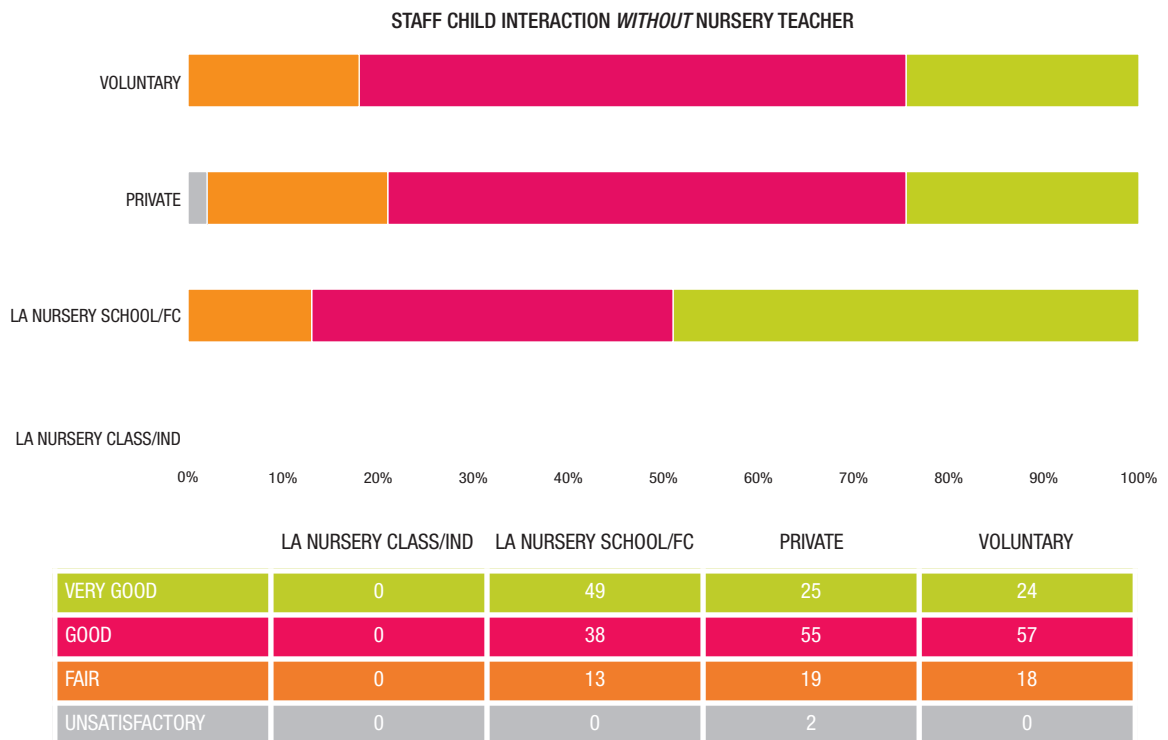
## STAFF/CHILD INTERACTION

The interaction of staff with young children is fundamental in providing them with the support they need to become confident individuals eager to explore and investigate their learning environment. Well-judged intervention by adults, knowledgeable about each child and their stages of development, is critical in extending and enhancing learning. Evidence showed higher evaluations where teachers were involved in the provision. Local authority nursery schools/family centres with teacher involvement had 16% more evaluations of very good compared to those centres without teacher input (65% compared to 49%). Within the private and voluntary sectors, the differences were similar with 14% more very good evaluations where teachers were involved compared with no teacher involvement.

**TABLE 2A:**  
**STAFF/CHILD INTERACTION IN CENTRES *WITH* A TEACHER**



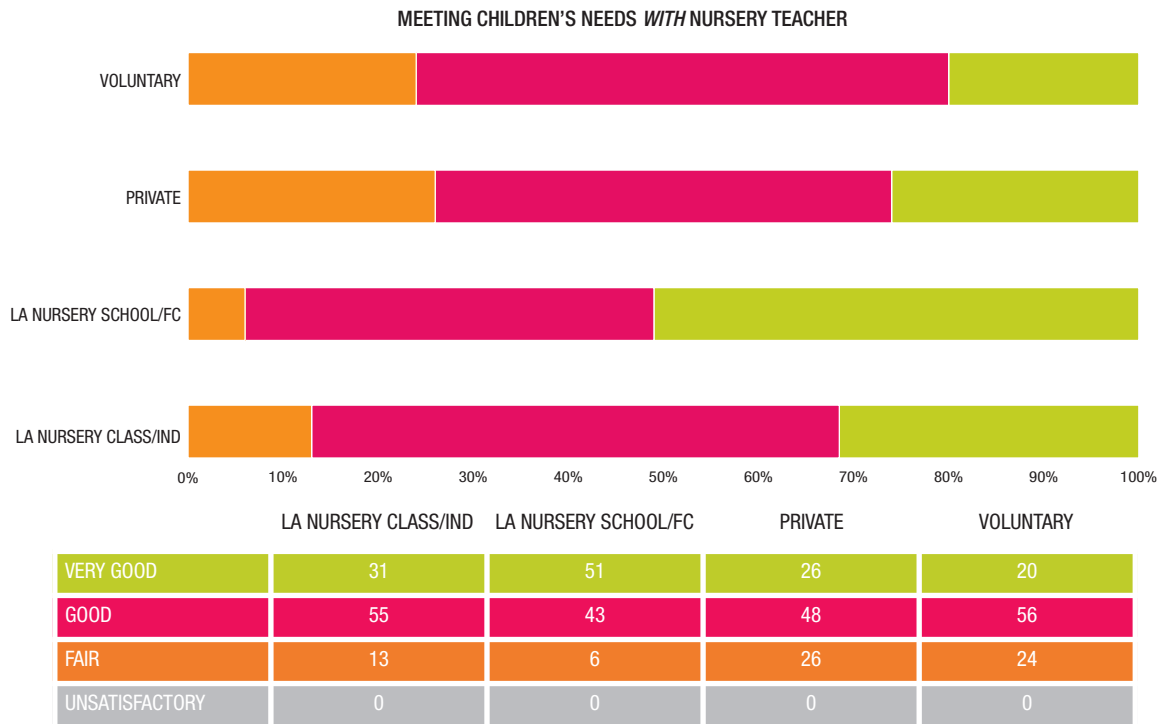
**TABLE 2B:**  
**STAFF/CHILD INTERACTION IN CENTRES *WITHOUT* A TEACHER**



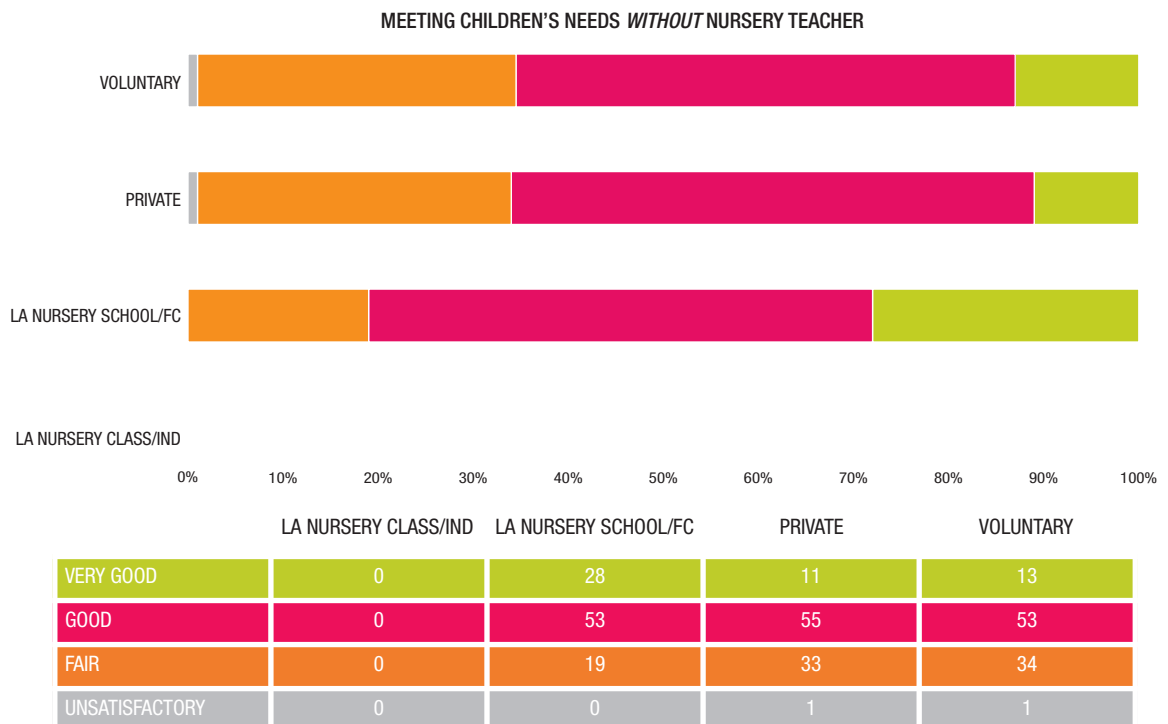
## MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS

Evidence for meeting pre-school children's needs showed a measurable difference in the percentage of very good evaluations of centres with teachers, compared to those without a teacher. Around twice as many local authority nursery schools and family centres (51%) with teacher involvement were evaluated as very good contrasted against those with no teacher input (28%). A similar picture was seen in the private and voluntary sectors with more than twice the percentage of establishments with teacher input evaluated as very good in comparison to those centres without.

**TABLE 3A:**  
**MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN CENTRES WITH A TEACHER**



**TABLE 3B:**  
**MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN CENTRES WITHOUT A TEACHER**



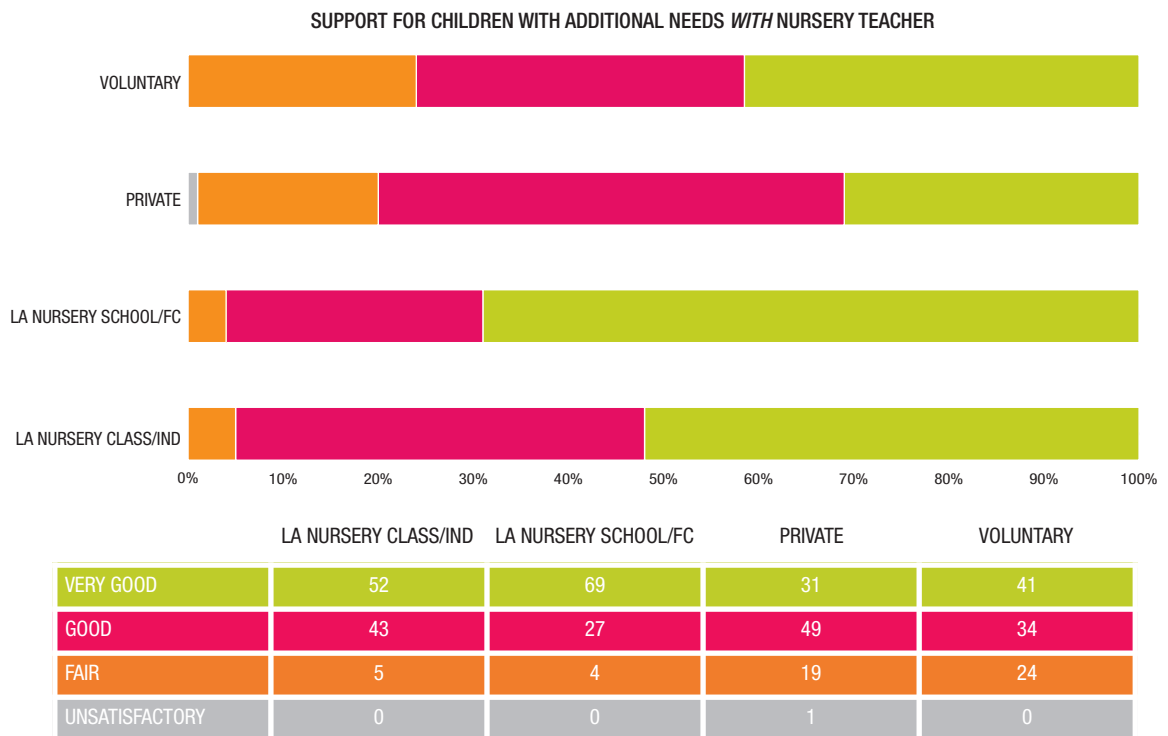
Percentages may not always total 100 due to rounding.



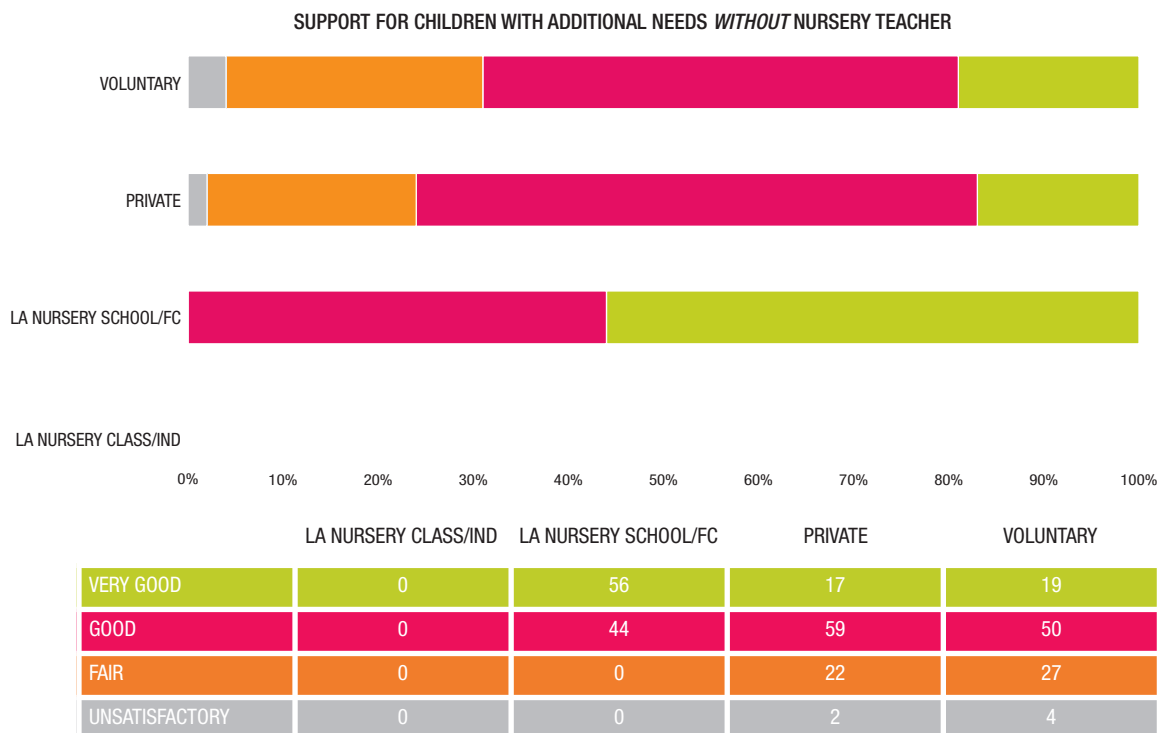
## SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

Teachers had a significant impact in supporting the development and learning of all children and, in particular, those who had additional support needs. They had an important role in delivering an appropriate experience for children who had complex learning needs and in ensuring that additional support plans were being developed where appropriate. In the private and voluntary sectors, there were considerable differences in the percentage of evaluations of very good in centres with teachers in contrast to those without. About twice as many (31% against 17% and 41% against 19% respectively) were considered very good where teachers were involved. Local authority provision generally had more established working partnerships with other professionals, such as educational psychologists, who supported children's needs.

**TABLE 4A:**  
SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN CENTRES *WITH* A TEACHER



**TABLE 4B:**  
SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN CENTRES *WITHOUT* A TEACHER

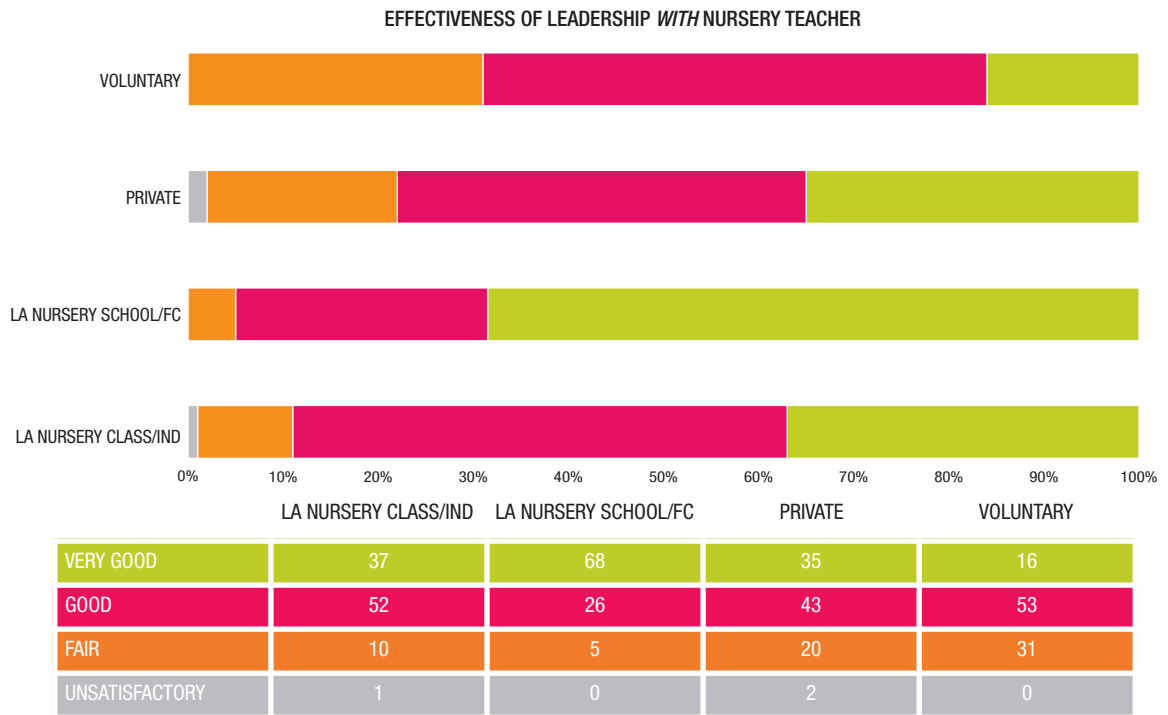


## LEADERSHIP

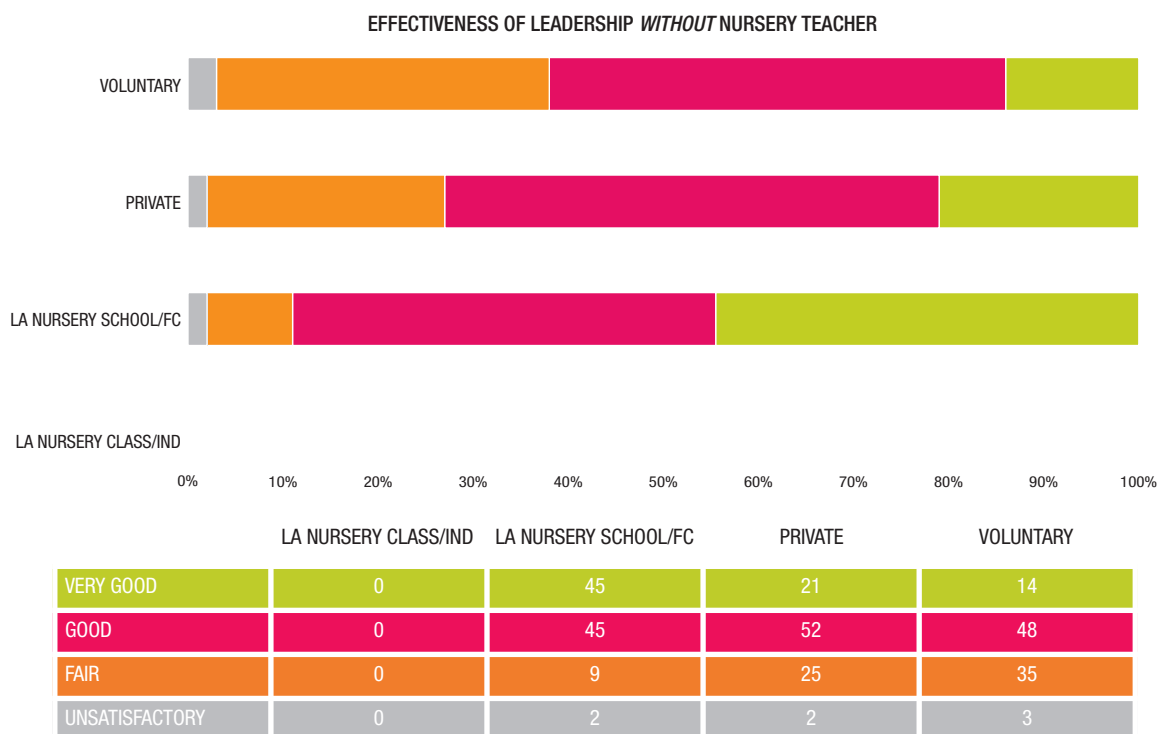
The quality of leadership was key to ensuring positive outcomes for children in all centres. Staff who had a high level of understanding and knowledge of pedagogy and child development were able to use their skills to lead the learning and model high quality interaction with young children, taking account of their stages of development. Local authority nursery schools achieved the highest percentage of very good evaluations for leadership (68%). These were led by experienced teachers who often also held additional special qualifications in early education. Where teachers were employed, the overall percentage of unsatisfactory and fair evaluations was reduced compared to those centres without a teacher. The smaller difference between the percentage of good and very good evaluations in voluntary provision was often the result of how teachers were deployed. The key role teachers had in these centres was a peripatetic support to help staff with planning the curriculum. This did not have the same direct impact on leadership of the centre. Across sectors, where the quality of provision was found to be weakest, there was a close link with leadership being evaluated as fair or unsatisfactory.

In centres aiming to improve their performance, service providers should take steps to improve management and leadership skills to ensure a higher quality of provision and improve the outcomes for pre-school children’s learning.

**TABLE 5A:**  
**LEADERSHIP IN CENTRES *WITH* A TEACHER**



**TABLE 5B:**  
**LEADERSHIP IN CENTRES *WITHOUT* A TEACHER**



## 4. EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE LINKED TO QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

The evidence from HMIE inspections highlighted characteristics which led to very effective professionals in early education, most often, but not wholly, found in pre-school centres where teachers were employed. Teachers played an important part in equipping their colleagues who were not teachers with the right knowledge, skills and training to meet the changing and increasing demands required of a high-quality, pre-school education. Teachers demonstrated very effective skills in coordinating partnership working. Within local authority and independent school nursery classes, qualified teachers operated often as the day-to-day managers with responsibility for the nursery. In these circumstances, teachers as team leaders regarded nursery nurses as valued colleagues and they worked well together.

HMIE evidence showed that effective staff practice, leading to quality experiences for children, did exist in some centres where no teacher was employed. Staff in these centres had often undertaken higher level qualifications and appropriate early years training. They had also benefited from good opportunities for continuing professional development and had received high-quality support from their local authority. Staff often worked closely with visiting teachers, sharing knowledge and experience. These factors had led to them having enhanced ability and effectiveness in providing quality experiences for children.

In the most effective practice, high-quality nursery education came from the combined strengths and qualities of the range of professionals involved. Common characteristics of leaders and key staff which led to high-quality provision included:

- very effective leadership skills with an ability to manage the expertise of the nursery team to support children's learning;
- an ability to develop skills of other staff who were less well qualified;
- an ability to access and use expertise from a range of professionals;
- a knowledge of how to organise and provide a supportive environment which helped children enjoy learning and be engaged and stimulated by it;
- an ability to facilitate and enable children to make choices and be independent; and
- a strong commitment to being reflective practitioners who are constantly striving to improve.

National and international research into early years education and childcare show that good outcomes for children are linked to settings that provide a strong educational focus with trained teachers working alongside and/or supporting less qualified staff. The EPPE research shows very clear correlation in its longitudinal study of 3000 children in England of the quality of children's pre-school experience with highly qualified staff, particularly teachers, to children's subsequent progress in education in primary school.

HMIE and EPPE evidence demonstrated a direct relationship between the quality of provision and the level of qualification of staff and their commitment to attaining appropriate qualifications. The potential impact on children's learning is considerable through the improved qualification of early years managers to degree level and the continued development of workforce qualifications.

**In centres with no teacher involvement, staff should be encouraged and supported to develop their skills and knowledge in order that they may have a significant impact on the quality of learning and teaching provided. Less well-qualified staff need to be supported to gain qualifications and improve skills through access to training, taking account of the requirements of the SSSC and the intended change in registration criteria for managers.**

## 5. CHANGES IN STAFFING STRUCTURES

### Impact of the repeal of the Schools (Scotland) Code

The Scottish Government annual census information gathered from all providers in the pre-school sector has shown a decline in the number of teachers employed in the pre-school sector from 2307 in 2004 to 2068 in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

Since the repeal of the Schools (Scotland) Code in 2003, the role of the nursery teacher in early years education has undergone considerable change. Local authorities have reviewed their services for children, particularly in light of the repeal of the code. They still recognise teachers as highly educated adults with specific training who make a significant difference to the quality of children's experiences within an early years service. However, teacher deployment in nursery education has varied across local authorities. Some authorities have not changed their commitment to deploying teachers in nursery schools and classes, and have raised the profile of teachers and revised their job descriptions. These authorities cited HMIE inspection data as evidence for doing this. The majority of authorities have continued to deploy teachers as the lead coordinator of the nursery team, often responsible for planning and assessment in young children's learning.

On the other hand, some authorities have replaced teachers with nursery nurses. In these authorities, nursery nurses still have links to teachers, but less directly in the nursery and more in a supportive way through staff development and training opportunities. In a few local authorities, teachers in nurseries have been redeployed into primary classes for primary teacher supply cover.

Apart from direct involvement in identified nursery schools and classes, teachers have undertaken various roles in pre-school education. Almost all local authorities have deployed teachers in some way to support partner centres in raising the quality of children's pre-school experiences in these establishments.

However, as a result of the reduction of teachers in some authorities, the staffing profile, in terms of maintaining at least one professional with degree status in settings, is changing. Not all centres which are delivering nursery education employ staff who are qualified to degree level.

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4 Scottish Executive National Statistics Publications

## Examples of effective deployment of teachers

Inspectors identified a range of ways in which local authorities were using teachers to support their own and partner centres in improving the quality of education for pre-school children. The following are some examples of effective deployment of teachers.

- Support to voluntary and private sector partnership centres from local authority teachers employed on a peripatetic or part-time basis where the teacher was modelling good practice in staff/child interaction or helping to develop aspects of the curriculum.
- Teachers training nursery nurses in pedagogy, planning and assessing progress.
- Teachers employed in specific services, for example teaching English as an additional language (EAL), assisting children with additional support needs, involvement in Sure Start initiatives and supporting extended, day nursery provision in learning communities.
- Early years education officers, who were teachers with early years experience, delivering support and assistance to staff operating in pre-school establishments. Where there was most effective practice, officers had direct responsibility for developing related policies and procedures.
- Teachers having responsibility for transition arrangements when children moved from pre-school to primary school, including instances of teachers of the nursery class in primary schools taking their class on into primary one to provide continuity in the children's learning and development.
- Deployment of former full-time seconded HMIE associate assessors, when they return to their education authorities, to monitor the quality of provision in partnership centres.

Local authorities need to ensure that, when they review the role and remit of teachers in early education, they make appropriate and effective use of the particular skills and expertise of teachers to ensure that they maintain the consistently high standard of provision and support for pre-school children's development and progress.



## Recent changes affecting the deployment of staff in pre-school

### Teachers' Agreement (2001)

The implementation of the teachers' agreement in 2001 was found to have had an additional effect on the deployment of teachers in pre-school settings. Local authorities have put in place different arrangements for supporting teachers' conditions of service. Some have re-deployed teachers from nurseries to primary schools to cover primary teachers' non-class contact time. As a result, nursery nurses are in turn covering teachers in nursery schools and classes. Although HMIE evidence points to some high quality provision where nursery nurses are employed, the full impact of these changes in deployment have yet to be evaluated.

### Rationalisation of nursery facilities

Another change was found in the reduction of nursery schools across the country. HMIE inspections found that nursery schools with teacher headteachers leading a team of teachers and other qualified nursery staff provided some of the best experiences to support children's progress, development and learning. In recent years, despite high-quality pre-school education being found in nursery schools, a number of local authorities have closed them down or replaced them with alternative provision.

Where services are being reorganised, care should be taken not to weaken existing, effective structures, such as that found most often in nursery schools with teacher involvement, which are providing high-quality nursery education.

### Changes in terms and conditions for nursery nurses

A contributory factor in the changing deployment of teachers has resulted from the agreements following the nursery nurse dispute in 2003/04. Nursery nurses in nursery schools and classes managed by the local authority had taken industrial action to improve the terms and conditions of their work. The role and remit of nursery nurses have changed significantly as a result of the settlement, following their industrial action. Under their new terms and conditions, nursery nurses are now often taking increased responsibility for curriculum planning and assessing, recording and reporting on children's progress. In many authorities, numerous job titles have replaced the traditional title of 'nursery nurse'. These have ranged from early years practitioner to early childhood officer or early education officer. Increased responsibilities allocated to nursery nurses as part of the settlement have been a factor in some authorities replacing teachers with nursery nurses when jobs have become vacant. The settlement has also provided more opportunities for nursery nurses to have a career structure. In a few councils, senior nursery nurses or their equivalent manage teachers.

## 6. DEVELOPMENTS IN EARLY YEARS QUALIFICATIONS

The SSSC were given a target for childcare partnerships to have 85% of the workforce qualified for registration with the Council by 2009. There has been a phased approach to registration of service employees with registration opening for managers in early education and childcare in October 2006 and for practitioners in early education and childcare in March 2007. Recent Scottish Government census information has shown an increase in the number of nursery staff qualified and a rise in the level of qualifications achieved. The number holding qualifications at SVQ Levels 2, 3 and 4 and at HNC level has increased from 2005 to 2007. This process of raising quality through education, training and a requirement on qualifications for early years' employees is designed to lead to more positive outcomes for children.

The National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce<sup>5</sup> led to proposals for all centres to be led by qualified leaders at SCQF level 9 (ordinary degree or work-based equivalent). The expectation was for programmes offering the new qualification to be in place for leaders by autumn 2008 and to raise the criteria for managers to a new level by 2011. The work is being led by SSSC in delivering the programme for the new qualifications and professional development framework in partnership with key stakeholders.

This new development in a qualification for leadership is designed to raise further the quality and competence of staff working in and managing centres. This level of qualification has the potential to work well in enhancing the professional skills mix of staff in the sector.

A few universities have customised courses to meet demands from local education authorities to develop further their staff's skills and knowledge in child development and pedagogy in pre-school education. Some local education authorities are working with universities to develop different types of qualification. For example, a transition course for teachers in nursery and P1 working with children aged 3 to 6 is aimed at assisting teachers to take nursery children on to P1 and, in turn, help P1 teachers work with nursery children. In addition, local authorities and schools are providing professional staff development and ensuring the provision of workplace mentoring to support trainee nursery teachers.

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Executive National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce, 2006

## 7. IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES

### Initial teacher education and newly qualified teachers

An important factor highlighted within this report relates to the placement of student teachers in early years centres.

With the reduction of teachers in nurseries in local authorities, universities are finding it difficult to place teacher education students in pre-school settings with experienced teachers. Headteachers and teachers expressed concern that student teachers are not being given sufficient encouragement and support to establish a career within the early years sector. With recent nursery school closures and teachers not being placed full time in centres, the placement of student teachers in early years establishments has proved to be difficult. Local authorities and teacher education institutions have worked effectively together to establish a database to support student placements in schools. This information will be important in helping to identify where students can undertake quality experience in pre-school centres with teachers.

**Difficulties in accessing sufficient, high quality early education establishments for student teacher placements should be addressed in liaison with teacher education institutions and local education authorities, building on their existing joint working.**

Under recent changes to GTCS registration, it has not been possible for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to carry out their probationary period wholly in a nursery school or class. NQTs are placed in primary or secondary schools for their first year of practice. Teachers have reduced opportunities to specialise or follow a career path in nursery education.

**The rules applied by GTCS, whereby newly qualified teachers cannot fulfil their probationary period wholly in a nursery school or class, should be reviewed to avoid the loss of new and enthusiastic teachers coming into the early education workforce.**

### Recruitment and retention of staff

Some difficulties in recruiting teachers to work in nurseries were found during this study. The key reasons given by local authorities include:

- lack of promotion opportunities;
- geographical issues such as the rural and isolated nature of provision;
- an ageing population profile in existing experienced teachers;
- uncertainty surrounding the teacher's role; and
- the rules applied by GTCS to newly qualified teachers.

Difficulties with recruitment in a few, mainly rural, councils have been a factor in councils changing existing pre-school staffing structures. Recent announcements by the Scottish Government to provide access to a teacher for every nursery age child, starting in deprived areas, and additional resources to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3, both have the potential to address some of the recruitment issues identified above.

**There is a need to address, at a national level, the full range of issues which limit staff recruitment and retention, particularly in rural situations, to ensure high-quality experiences for pre-school children.**

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

In an evolving situation where new patterns of teacher involvement in pre-school education and care are being developed, it is important to maintain a clear focus on the factors which contribute to the effective provision of high-quality services within the pre-school sector.

This report has focused on the incidence of high-quality provision across all sectors of early education delivery – local authority nursery schools and classes and family centres, independent schools, private business nurseries and voluntary groups – and has sought to discern the key qualities and characteristics which contribute to very good practice. Highly effective centres show common characteristics among leaders and key staff. These characteristics were most often, but not wholly, found in establishments where teachers were deployed. HMIE evidence found that, overall, the quality of children’s experiences was of a higher standard in nursery schools and nursery classes where, traditionally, teachers were employed. Teachers, using their acquired knowledge of learners, learning, teaching and assessment, were most able to apply this expertise to ensure effective early education practice.

In centres which demonstrated effective practice where no teacher was employed, staff had often undertaken higher level qualifications and appropriate early years training. This, along with continuing professional development and high-quality support from their local authority and teachers, enabled them to demonstrate effective characteristics which led to the delivery of high-quality provision.

The importance of children’s pre-school experiences is crucial to their future learning and to their developing role as responsive and contributing adults in society. In taking forward the 3 to 18 curriculum, the workforce needs to be equipped with the right knowledge, skills mix and training needed to meet the changing and increasing demands required of a high quality, early years service. It is important, therefore, to ensure that developing all staff in the workforce is placed centre stage and integral to the planning and delivery of quality early years services.

The new degree-level qualification for leadership development could help to raise further the quality and competence of staff working in and managing centres. This level of qualification could work well beside that of the teacher to complement the delivery of high-quality services.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- In centres aiming to improve their performance, service providers should take steps to improve management and leadership skills to ensure a higher quality of provision and improve the outcomes for pre-school children's learning.
- In centres with no teacher involvement, staff should be encouraged and supported to develop their skills and knowledge so that they may have a significant impact on the quality of learning and teaching provided.
- Less qualified staff need to be well supported to gain qualifications and improve skills through access to training, taking account of the requirements of the SSSC for staff.
- Local authorities need to ensure that, when they review the role and remit of teachers in early education, they make appropriate and effective use of the particular skills and expertise of teachers to ensure that they maintain the consistently high standard of provision and support for pre-school children's development and progress.
- Where services are being reorganised, care should be taken not to weaken existing, effective provision, such as that found most often in nursery schools with teacher involvement, which are providing high-quality nursery education.
- Difficulties in accessing sufficient high quality early education establishments for student teacher placements should be addressed in liaison with teacher education institutions and local education authorities.
- The rules applied by GTCS, whereby newly qualified teachers cannot fulfil their probationary period wholly in a nursery school or class, should be reviewed to avoid the loss of new and enthusiastic teachers coming into the early education workforce.
- There is a need to address, at a national level, the full range of issues which limit recruitment and retention, particularly in rural situations, to ensure high-quality experiences for pre-school children.

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