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Guidance

Registered early years providers

Updated 11 July 2022

Applies to England

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We've split the questions up into groups for easy reading. They should be read alongside the [early years inspection handbook](#).

Early years foundation stage (EYFS)

Will Ofsted want to see as much paperwork as possible? Should providers store their paperwork in a folder marked 'Ofsted'?

Ofsted does not want to see a particular amount or type of paperwork during an inspection.

Paragraph 2.2 of the [EYFS framework](#) sets out the requirements on paperwork related to assessment. Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, or require excessive paperwork. Practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement, and should not be required to prove this through collection of physical evidence.

Settings should use whatever approach to paperwork suits them. They are free to file it however they like.

Each inspection is unique, and inspectors will only ask to see evidence they consider appropriate to that individual setting. This is usually determined by their observations of teaching and learning.

The paperwork most often requested is listed in paragraphs 48-49 of the [early years inspection handbook](#), but it is unlikely that an inspector will want to see all of these documents at every inspection.

The revised EYFS framework, which came into force on 1 September 2021, no longer includes the requirement for providers to seek permission from Ofsted to keep any records securely off site.

However, it is for providers to ensure that they comply with data protection obligations.

How will inspectors consider progress?

Ofsted considers the curriculum as the progression model. By progress, we mean that children know more, remember more and are able to do more of what was intended in the curriculum, which are the EYFS learning and development requirements.

In early years, progress might mean:

- for example, knowing sounds of farm animals, knowing that an oven gets hot, knowing the meaning of countless words or knowing what facial expressions suggest
- 'know how' – for example, knowing how to hold a pair of scissors, knowing how to catch a ball, knowing that we should take turns and how to do so, knowing how to dress and undress a doll and knowing how to hold and turn the pages of a book
- knowing behaviours and habits for the future – for example, knowing to look at the teacher, knowing phrases such as 'kind hands' and 'tidy-up time', knowing to listen when others speak and knowing that we sit when listening to stories

We can say that these have been learned when they are remembered.

Inspectors will want to see that the curriculum on offer sequences the knowledge that children need. They will look at what staff teach children, and whether children know and remember that curriculum.

Will Ofsted expect providers to show the progress of a child tracked against the revised non-statutory guidance, 'Development matters'?

Ofsted does not have a preferred method of how settings assess children's progress, and inspectors will not ask to see any internal tracking or assessment information. Our inspection handbook outlines how we will gather evidence through observation and discussion during an inspection.

Inspectors will want to find out about the story of a child, including:

- what they knew and could do when they started at the provision
- what they can do now and how you helped them to learn it

- what you intend for the child to learn in future, so that they are ready for their next stage

We know that early years practitioners are skilled at getting to know children and finding out what they know and can do. This is what is important. Whatever ‘system’ providers have in place for the assessment of young children should not take adults away from those important interactions.

As outlined in our handbook and in our myth-busting work, inspectors do not expect to see documentation other than that set out in the EYFS framework. They will use the evidence gathered from discussions and observations to judge the overall quality of the curriculum provided for children.

Will Ofsted prefer to see paper assessments rather than those recorded electronically?

Ofsted will not be looking at assessment information during inspections. The EYFS does not prescribe a way of carrying out or recording assessments, as long as assessment is effective and helps children’s learning, development and progress.

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As outlined above, inspectors will want to find out the ‘story’ of a child. We know that early years practitioners are skilled at getting to know children and finding out what they know and can do. This is what is important. Whatever ‘system’ providers have in place for the assessment of young children should not take adults away from those important interactions.

Inspectors will not expect to see documentation other than that set out in the EYFS framework. They will use the evidence gathered from discussions and observations to judge the overall quality of the curriculum provided for children.

Does Ofsted expect practitioners to use the government’s non-statutory guidance, ‘Development matters’, when developing and shaping their curriculums?

The EYFS’s educational programmes provide the framework for the curriculum. It is up to providers to decide how to expand, extend and broaden these. It is for providers to decide what guidance they choose to use when developing and shaping their curriculums.

Ofsted inspects providers in line with the principles and requirements of the EYFS. Providers may find it helpful to use 'Development matters', but we do not inspect against this guidance.

How will Ofsted inspect the curriculum? Do registered providers need to produce a curriculum map?

We are keen to bust this myth! We do not know where the idea of a 'curriculum map' has come from, but we are clear that what children learn in the early years is incredibly important for their future success. It is for providers to decide how to talk about that information with inspectors. Some providers may choose to map this out, but others may present what they do in a different way.

Inspectors will want to know how leaders design an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum that prepares children well for the next stage of their education. Providers will be asked what they want children to learn and why, how they are helping children know more and remember more, and how they measure this success. We use knowing more and remembering more for all areas of learning in the EYFS. Physical development, for example knowing how to balance on a wheeled toy or knowing when to use the toilet, and emotional development are just as important as knowing, remembering and understanding more words.

Our inspection handbooks for registered early years providers and for schools make it clear that curriculum planning does not need to be in any specific format. There is no need to produce a 'curriculum map'. It is up to providers to determine the format of their planning, and it is up to leaders to justify these plans based on what they want children to encounter, explore and learn in the setting.

What impact have the EYFS reforms had on Ofsted inspections?

Ofsted inspects in line with the principles and requirements set out in the statutory EYFS framework, to evaluate the overall quality and standards of a setting's early years provision. Ofsted inspections remain in line with the requirements set out in the revised EYFS framework for all early years providers.

COVID-19 pandemic

Will Ofsted negatively judge settings for having ‘stripped-back, COVID-safe provision’, for example provision with no soft furnishings, dressing-up clothes, pillows or cosy spaces, and no sand or water?

We know that some settings have changed what they deliver, and how they deliver it, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while we will not judge settings negatively on how they have been delivering their EYFS provision during the pandemic and as we emerge from it, inspectors may ask why settings are still offering ‘stripped-back’ provision.

Inspectors will seek to understand any ongoing impact of the pandemic and how providers have adapted their approaches as a result of the pandemic, including the rationale for any new or modified ways of working. Inspectors will also want to see the extent to which leaders have designed an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum, how they are addressing any disruption, and how they are ensuring that any gaps in knowledge are closed so that children are prepared for their next stage of education.

Are there flexibilities in place for providers that are facing recruitment and retention issues or experiencing high numbers of staff off sick? Will Ofsted take this into consideration when inspecting?

Paragraph 3.31 of the EYFS framework states:

“ Exceptionally, and where the quality of care and safety and security of children is maintained, changes to the ratios may be made.”

Early years settings and schools, however, remain responsible for ensuring the safety and security of children in their care. Our inspectors will want to understand how providers are continuing to meet this requirement if they are temporarily using the existing ratio flexibilities set out in the EYFS framework.

Inspection practice

What's happened to the COVID-19 section which was in the previous edition of the early years inspection handbook?

The dedicated COVID-19 section has been removed from the September 2022 edition of the early years inspection handbook (published on 1 July 2022).

As all government restrictions were lifted some time ago, and we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, a dedicated COVID-19 section in the handbook is no longer appropriate.

However, we recognise that the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic may have impacted on what children know, remember and can do, resulting in some children having a wider than usual range of starting points and gaps in their knowledge.

Inspectors will continue to seek to understand any ongoing impact of the pandemic on providers, and will pay close attention to:

- how providers identify and address any of these delays and gaps
- what the provider is doing to address any disruption to learning to ensure that children are well prepared for their next stage of education
- how leaders have adapted their approaches as a result of the pandemic, including the rationale for any new or modified ways of working

Inspectors will take this into account when reaching final inspection judgements.

Can Ofsted carry out inspections without any notice?

Ofsted can carry out inspections without notice. No-notice inspections normally, but not exclusively, take place when a setting has been judged as inadequate at its last inspection, or someone has raised concerns about a setting.

During an inspection, will Ofsted expect the manager to be available at all times to speak to the inspectors?

Ofsted does not expect managers to be immediately available to speak to the inspectors. Inspectors want to see settings operating as they would on any other day, and they will work around normal timetables. Meetings with managers will take place at a mutually convenient time during the inspection.

Is it only managers who can attend the feedback session at the end of an inspection?

It is not true that inspectors will only give feedback to managers. The feedback session is confidential until the final report is published, but other staff can be included where it is feasible.

Can a registered early years setting achieve a judgement more than one grade above its previous inspection outcome?

A setting can improve by more than one grade. The early years inspection handbook sets out how inspectors will use their professional judgement to weigh up the evidence gathered for each key judgement, considered against the grade descriptors to reach fair and reliable judgements that reflect the quality of provision. If inspectors find during the inspection that a setting has improved by more than one grade, they will judge it accordingly.

Will making a complaint about an inspection go against a childcare setting the next time it is inspected?

When making inspection judgements, Ofsted does not take into account any past complaints lodged by a setting. Inspectors act fairly and without bias at all times, and their judgements are based solely on evidence. Inspection reports are also quality assured by other inspectors before they are finalised, to confirm that judgements are firmly supported by evidence. Our quality assurance and complaints procedure is clearly outlined in our [early years inspection handbook](#).

We want to remove any misconceptions, ensure that the inspection process is as clear as possible and reduce anxiety. It's in everyone's interest that inspection helps deliver a good quality of care for all young children.

Can before- and after-school clubs and holiday provision use Ofsted logos?

Providers who were previously inspected prior to the EIF may be [using specific Ofsted logos] (<https://logos.ofsted.gov.uk/using-and-downloading>) to promote their judgement, for example on

their websites.

However, under the EIF, these providers are no longer judged against the 4-point scale. They are inspected as part of Annex A of the early years inspection handbook, and receive a judgement of met, not met with actions or not met with enforcement. This is a change from the previous framework, under which these providers could get a grade of good or outstanding, and use Ofsted logos. This change means that when before- and after-school club providers are first inspected under the EIF, they will need to remove any logos they've previously used, though this does not necessarily indicate a change in quality.

We do not provide logos for met judgements. In these circumstances, providers are still able to:

- state their judgement, and that they have met the requirements of the EYFS, on websites, marketing materials and so on
- link to their page on our reports site, which will allow members of the public to see their inspection history

We recognise that there will also be a crossover period for the next couple of years for those providers that have multiple settings, during which time some settings will be able to use a logo and others won't. However, by following the suggested actions above, providers who have achieved a judgement of met should be able to reassure the public that they are fulfilling the requirements of the EYFS.

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