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Guidance

Early years inspection information: for use from November 2025

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Applies to England

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About this page

This page contains general information about our inspections of registered early years settings for a general audience.

It does not explain how inspectors carry out inspections, which is in our separate [operating guide for early years inspections](#). The operating guide sets out what inspectors do on inspection, who we engage with and how, and how we feed back to leaders and report our findings. This page also does not contain the standards inspectors use to evaluate provision. Those standards, with guidance on applying them across different provider types, are in our [toolkit for registered early years settings](#). These documents should be read together.

Types of inspection

We regulate and inspect registered early years settings in line with the principles and requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework:

- [EYFS statutory framework for childminders](#)
- [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#)

The EYFS is written by the Department for Education (DfE) and contains information about the requirements that all settings registered on the Early Years Register must meet.

Full inspections

Full inspections are carried out under [section 49](#) and [section 50](#) of the [Childcare Act 2006](#). We grade settings for each of the evaluation areas. For further information about how we carry out

full inspections, please see the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

No children on roll inspections

No children on roll inspections are carried out under [section 49](#) and [section 50](#) of the [Childcare Act 2006](#), where no children in the early years age range are present or on roll. Inspectors must make it clear at the start of the inspection, or during the initial notification telephone call, that the inspection will be a check that the provider continues to be suitable to remain registered, but it is not a full inspection. For further information about how we conduct these inspections, please see the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Childcare Register compliance inspections

Childcare Register compliance inspections are checks on providers that are registered only on the Childcare Register. These are to make sure they are complying with the ongoing requirements for registration. These are different from the inspections described in this document. For further information, refer to our guidance on [carrying out Childcare Register compliance inspections](#).

Childminder agencies

Ofsted also inspects childminder agencies in line with the latest requirements set out by the DfE. These are different from the inspections described in this document. For further information, refer to [Inspection of childminder agencies: requirements for Ofsted](#).

Types of settings we inspect

We inspect all settings that are required to register on the Early Years Register. This includes a range of different settings that provide education and care for children from birth to age 5.

Schools with early years provision

Schools that admit children aged 2 years and over as part of their early years provision are not required to register this provision with us if it meets the exemption set out in the Childcare Act 2006.

We inspect provision for these children in our school inspections (see the [operating guide for school inspections](#)).

Schools that admit children younger than 2 years old must register with us. We inspect this early years provision, which may also include older children, under the inspection arrangements set out in the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Information about registering school- based provision is set out in [Registering and inspecting school-based provision](#).

When we inspect registered early years settings

We carry out inspections of early years settings in England that are registered under [section 49](#) and [section 50](#) of the [Childcare Act 2006](#).

Settings registered on the Early Years Register are normally inspected at least once within a 6-year window. We prioritise the first inspection of settings that are newly registered on the Early Years Register. This is normally within 30 months of the registration date.

We use the setting's previous inspection outcome, alongside any other information we hold about it, to determine the timing of its next inspection. We prioritise inspections and/or inspect more frequently when we receive concerns about a setting and

the subsequent risk assessment concludes that an inspection is needed.

Settings will usually be inspected again within:

- 6 years if all evaluation areas are graded 'expected standard' or above
- 12 months if any evaluation area is graded as 'needs attention'
- 6 months if any evaluation area is graded as 'urgent improvement'

Settings may be inspected sooner if we have concerns that the statutory requirements of the EYFS are not being met and/or information suggests children are at significant risk.

We reserve the right to inspect without notice, where necessary.

The inspection team

Early years inspections are normally carried out by one inspector. Larger group settings, settings with multiple spaces, or those where we have concerns about suitability and/or the safety of inspectors, may require additional inspectors.

Inspections of early years settings are carried out by:

- Early Years Regulatory Inspectors, who we employ directly
- Ofsted Inspectors (OI), who are contracted to work for us part-time; they are either serving or non-serving practitioners in early years settings, including childminders

If there is more than one inspector, then one of these will be the lead inspector. In all other cases, the early years inspector is responsible for notifying the setting, making the planning call to the setting and writing the [report card](#).

Sometimes new inspectors, members of our non-inspection staff or other professionals may be present on site to observe an inspection. An inspector may also visit a setting to make sure the inspection meets our quality assurance and consistency standards. We will notify the leader during the notification call if there will be additional people with the inspection team.

We will notify the setting during the notification call if there will be additional people with the inspection team.

Conduct

Throughout the inspection, we expect providers and inspectors to act in line with our [code of conduct](#) and to show professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

Approach to inspecting childminders

We inspect childminder settings in a way that works for their specific contexts. We make practical adjustments to ensure that the inspection methodology is applied proportionately to the context.

More information about how these inspections take place is in the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Approach to inspecting before- and after-school settings and

holiday provision

The learning and development requirements of the EYFS do not apply to before- and after-school settings and holiday provision. This includes childminders who provide care only before and after school, or during the school holidays, for children who normally attend Reception classes (or classes for older children) during the school day. Therefore, the evaluation areas for curriculum and teaching and for achievement do not apply to these settings.

More information about how these inspections take place is in the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Information about the inspection process

Overall inspection focus

Our renewed inspections reflect a significant shift in inspection culture. There is a stronger emphasis on leadership as a driver of sustained improvement, and on inclusion. These emphases are reflected both in the themes guiding our evidence-gathering and in the standards within the toolkit.

Inspections are grounded in respectful professional dialogue, focused on impact and designed to support self-improvement and inclusive practice. They are structured but also flexible, adapting to context, responding to evidence and concentrating on what matters most for children. Shared observations are important and allow leaders to share their context.

Inspectors work with leaders to build an accurate view of the

quality of the setting. This includes knowing and understanding how well children:

- achieve – develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need
- belong – feel safe, welcomed and valued
- thrive – benefit from the right systems, processes and levels of oversight so that they are kept safe and are able to flourish, whatever their background or individual needs

Inspectors will consider what leaders are aiming to achieve, how well they are doing it and how they know it is working. They will also consider whether providers continue to meet the requirements of their registration and of the EYFS. Inspectors' starting point is the 'expected standard' in each of the evaluation areas in the toolkit. These considerations underpin planning, shape evidence-gathering and guide our evaluation from preparation through to final reporting.

Inspectors continue to follow the 5 principles of good regulation, which are: proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting. This allows us to perform our dual function as an inspectorate and regulator.

The foundations of our renewed inspections are:

- children and pupils first – high expectations with a focus on outcomes and experiences
- the care and well-being of those we inspect – through collaborative working with settings and building positive relationships with leaders and staff
- a provider's unique context – evidence is evaluated in the light of each setting's strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement, and how well it identifies and meets the needs of significant groups of children
- the lens of the toolkit – the toolkit sets out the grading

standards, supporting shared professional dialogue

- quality and impact – evidence-based decisions focus on the quality and the impact of leaders' choices and actions on children, reflected in the grading standards

Throughout inspection, we give particular attention to the experiences and outcomes of disadvantaged children, children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), children known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being. These groups are central to all planning, inspection activity and evaluation.

What happens if we receive concerns about a setting

We risk-assess any information we receive about early years provision. This information is logged on the provider's record, and we consider this either at the next inspection or refer it to the Ofsted region where the setting is located. Colleagues in the region decide whether to inspect the provision or to complete a regulatory visit/call. In some instances, this will result in an inspection without notice. Our [early years and childcare enforcement policy](#) provides more detail about [how we act on information we receive](#).

Length of inspection

Time spent on inspection normally depends on the type of setting and its size. If the inspection is likely to take longer than usual, the inspector discusses this with the setting's leader at the earliest opportunity.

Inspectors agree their arrival time with the setting's leaders when

they notify them that the inspection is taking place.

For childminders, inspections normally last around 3 hours.

For group provision that operates for restricted daily hours, inspections normally last around 4 hours. For group provision that operates for a full day, inspections normally last around 6 hours.

What happens when a setting is notified of an inspection

When the setting is notified about an inspection it must inform parents and carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading) that an inspection is taking place and allow the inspector to display a poster at the setting to explain this.

Leaders at the setting will receive an email, shortly after the notification call, that gives guidance about the inspection, including:

- Ofsted's privacy notice
- how to raise concerns during the inspection
- a reminder about the setting's statutory duty to inform parents about the inspection
- links to the inspection framework, operating guide and toolkit, and publicly held data about the setting's local area
- a request that they think about who is responsible for their welfare – this will usually be their employer but, if there is no employer, leaders can provide details of someone else whom we may contact in an emergency

The email also asks for factual details about the setting, which will be discussed during the inspection, including:

- age range and number of children on roll

- number of 5-year-olds on roll
- operating times
- number of staff and their levels of qualification
- number and age of children receiving additional funding, including the early years pupil premium and disability access funding
- number of children with SEND

Settings are not required to do any additional work or set up any activities specifically for the inspection. We do not want our inspection to create unnecessary workload. Settings do not need to provide evidence for the inspection beyond what we ask for or that is required by the EYFS.

Who can attend the notification and planning calls

During the notification call, the lead inspector (where relevant) will explain the later planning call, including agreeing who can attend.

Inspectors will ask the setting not to record these calls or any further calls.

Childminders

Childminders are the leaders of their settings. If they do not have anyone to invite to these meetings, this does not affect the inspection in any negative way.

For group-based settings

During the notification call, the lead inspector (where relevant) and the leader of the setting will agree on who attends the planning call. Where relevant, we encourage leaders to have at least one other person present to assist and support them. Typically, this would be someone who usually deputises for

them and who can understand and discuss the content of the call. This may be [the nominee](#), where applicable.

Information inspectors may ask for during the notification call

In the notification call, the inspector:

- asks to speak to the manager of the setting or, if they are unavailable, the most senior member of staff
- lets the setting know that an inspection is taking place
- explains the type and length of the inspection
- confirms the manager's details
- checks if there are any conflicts of interest or concerns

The inspector agrees the time for a second, planning call later the same day, which will last approximately 30 minutes. The purpose of the planning call is for the inspector to understand the setting's context and to discuss practicalities. Details of what is discussed during the planning call are given in the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

The inspector also gives the setting an opportunity to confirm whether anyone who will be joining the planning call requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability. They may also consider making other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may be put at a disadvantage.

Documents that EY settings must provide

Inspectors must be able to access, either online or in printed

form, information that relates to:

- paediatric first-aid arrangements
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) records and any other documents summarising the checks on, and the vetting and employment arrangements of, all staff working at the setting

However, inspectors do not need to see the DBS checks for:

- those providing childcare on domestic premises
- childminders (including childminders without domestic premises)
- any known assistants and/or household members

This is because these will already have been seen as part of the registration process.

Documents that inspectors may need to see during the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors may need to see the policies required by the EYFS, and other relevant information, such as:

- referrals made to the local authority designated officer for safeguarding, and their resolution
- details of all children who are an open case to social care/children's services and for whom there is a multi-agency plan
- children present at the setting during the inspection (if not shown on the register)
- records of accidents
- records where children have been refused a place
- logs of incidents of discrimination, including racist incidents

- records of any complaints and their resolution

Providers should refer to the relevant EYFS requirements to check which documents they are required to have.

Settings may be asked to provide these documents during inspection. They should be able to provide access to them, either online or in printed form, during inspection. However, it is likely that the inspector will cover the matters relating to them during discussions.

Role of the nominee

Settings are invited to nominate a member of staff to support planning, communication and engagement throughout the inspection.

The nominee is a role that may not always be relevant for every inspection. It is distinct from the 'nominated individual' and does not replace this.

For childminders or smaller group-based settings

There is no need for a nominee or any expectation that settings provide one.

For group-based settings

In some settings, such as larger group-based providers, leaders may nominate someone to be the nominee, if this is practical. Their involvement can help the inspection to run smoothly and remain focused and purposeful.

Where there is a nominee, their role is to:

- attend the planning call alongside the leader
- brief the setting's staff about inspection arrangements

- provide information for the inspector to support inspection planning
- provide insight into the setting's context
- liaise with the inspector and make sure that documents and other information are available
- attend reflection meetings and the final grading meeting
- act as the link between the inspector and setting leader if the setting wants to raise any issues and concerns or to clarify anything about the inspection
- keep other leaders up to date on the progress of the inspection
- join the inspector for inspection activities, where appropriate
- suggest to the inspector where additional evidence could usefully be gathered
- coordinate feedback arrangements, in particular at the end of the inspection

Further information about the nominee

It is not compulsory to have a nominee. Settings will not be at any disadvantage if they do not nominate someone.

The nominee should have thorough knowledge of how the setting operates on a day-to-day basis. We encourage leaders to make the decision based on their setting's staffing and specific needs.

The leader may take on this role if they wish to and feel able to.

A member of staff who is an OI can be a nominee.

Training for nominees is available but not compulsory.

The nominee will not have access to confidential inspection

notes, safeguarding complaints, or any whistle-blowing information.

Nominees will not be present during confidential discussions with children, staff or parents, or where their presence could limit open dialogue.

Requesting a deferral or pause in inspection

If the setting needs to ask for a deferral, it should do so as early as possible after it is notified of the inspection, or, in unannounced inspections, after the inspector's arrival. The decision whether to grant a deferral will be made in accordance with our [deferral policy](#).

If the setting leader thinks an inspection should stop once it has started, we will consider the request under our [pausing policy](#).

Next steps following our inspection findings

At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector (where relevant) provides feedback to those who hold overall accountability, or their representative. This feedback includes their final evaluation of the setting's strengths and priorities for improvement. More detail is available in our [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Who can attend the final

feedback meeting

The final feedback meeting should include the nominated individual and/or their representative and the nominee, if relevant. Any appropriate person connected to the registration that leaders of the setting wish to be present to assist and support them can also attend. Attendance at the meeting is voluntary.

The lead inspector (where relevant) seeks to ensure that the meeting is practical and constructive by managing the number of attendees and the conduct of all attending. They will make sure that leaders know that their input in this meeting is valued.

Inspection grades are provisional until the final report card has been sent to the setting. Further information about what the inspector will discuss during the feedback meeting can be found in the [operating guide for early years inspections](#).

Settings claiming funding

Local authorities may use our inspection findings to make decisions about funding for settings.

A setting remains eligible to claim funding until the local authority removes the setting from its directory of providers offering funded early education places. The authority will advise settings if they are likely to do this and, if they do so, will inform them about next steps.

The [statutory guidance for local authorities on the provision of early education and childcare](#) sets out the quality standards that settings need to meet for local authorities to fund places.

Gathering additional evidence

In some circumstances, we may carry out another visit to the setting to gather additional evidence. Please see our [gathering additional evidence protocol](#) for further information.

Early years settings that are not complying with the EYFS requirements at inspection

We may take enforcement action when we find a provider is not meeting the requirements of the EYFS and that non-compliance significantly impacts on children's learning and development and/or safety and well-being.

When deciding on the type of action to take, we consider the evidence gathered during the inspection, alongside the setting's compliance history and any other information we hold. The [early years enforcement policy](#) gives more information about possible enforcement action.

If we find the provider is not meeting the requirements of the EYFS at inspection, we may consider [setting an action](#). We do this if the provider can show they understand the requirements and we believe they can make the necessary improvements without the need for statutory enforcement action. We list any actions raised in the inspection report card and include details of the steps the provider must take within a specified time frame. When there is a significant failure to meet the safeguarding and welfare requirements, inspectors will normally serve a welfare requirements notice. We monitor compliance with any action(s) set and follow this up at the next inspection.

More information about this is in our [early years enforcement policy](#).

Potential misconceptions about inspection

Toolkit

We do not expect leaders to produce written evidence to support each standard in each evaluation area.

The toolkit focuses on the quality and impact of leaders' choices and decisions on children, rather than compliance alone. It is used to guide conversations, reflect on evidence and make sure grades reflect the evidence gathered. It supports a shared understanding and discussion of the strengths of the setting's work, its context and areas for further exploration.

We do not expect providers to have completed any formal self-evaluation using the toolkit. However, settings may wish to use the toolkit to support continuous improvement. In the planning call with leaders, we will ask where they see themselves against the 5-point scale of each evaluation area.

The toolkit applies to all types of settings, including childminders. The inspector uses it in a way that is suitable for each type of provider.

Curriculum

The EYFS statutory framework sets out the requirements that

schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years. Inspection is aligned with these principles and requirements. We do not have additional or separate rules.

We evaluate settings that take radically different approaches to the curriculum fairly. Inspectors evaluate curriculums favourably if they have been built or adopted with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, and implemented effectively. Inspectors consider the extent to which the curriculum reflects the breadth and ambition of the EYFS.

Inspectors do not look unfavourably on settings that use curriculums created by others, for example commercial or local schemes. They consider how inclusive the curriculum, culture and practices are. This is the case whether the setting has devised its own curriculum or uses, for example, commercial or local schemes/programmes. It is up to leaders to determine the setting's practices and to justify these on their own merits.

Planning, teaching and assessment

We do not prefer any particular method of planning, teaching or assessment.

We do not expect a specific format for curriculum planning.

We do not grade individual staff or activities.

We do not evaluate planning, teaching and assessment in out-of-school settings.

Safeguarding

Our safeguarding expectations are those the DfE has set out in

the EYFS, [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working together to safeguard children](#).

We do not expect or require the setting to apply retrospectively for DBS checks and other pre-employment checks for staff who were appointed before DBS requirements were introduced, and who have been employed continuously since then.

Evidence/recordings

We do not require photographic evidence of what children are doing and learning in settings.

We do not expect providers to prepare a presentation or any additional documentation about their setting or context for inspection. Inspectors prioritise examining first-hand evidence during the inspection.

Artificial intelligence

A setting's use of artificial intelligence (AI) is not an explicit part of our inspection and regulation frameworks.

There is no expectation that a setting will use AI in a certain way or will use it at all.

Inspectors do not directly evaluate the use of AI or any AI tool. Our focus is, instead, on the quality of decision-making about AI.

Complaints about the provider from parents

The EYFS explains what providers must put in place to deal with concerns and complaints from parents.

If we receive concerns or complaints about a setting, the inspection will focus on the wider issues raised by the complaints, what the setting has done in response and the impact this has had on children. Inspectors do not investigate individual complaints. If a complainant has asked for confidentiality, inspectors will do everything they can to protect their identity and ensure it is not shared with the setting. Sometimes, the nature of the complaint may make it possible for the setting's leaders to identify the complainant. However, inspectors must not confirm who the complainant is.

Concerns or complaints about inspection

We take any concerns seriously. Leaders are free to raise concerns, and doing so does not negatively affect inspection findings or how we grade a setting.

If settings or the public have a concern during an inspection, including about inspectors' conduct or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, they should raise these with the inspector at the earliest opportunity. This is to try to resolve any issues before the inspection is completed. If there are any concerns that the provider cannot resolve with the inspector during the inspection visit, they can contact a senior Ofsted leader using the number provided as part of the notification process.

If it is not possible to resolve concerns with the inspector during the inspection or through a telephone call either during or after the inspection, leaders or the responsible person should follow the steps set out in our [complaints process](#).

We respond to any complaints before we finalise the report card

and send it to the setting. If the setting has highlighted some minor points about clarity or factual accuracy in the draft report card, it will not normally be able to submit a formal complaint or challenge about these once the report card has been finalised.

When and how report cards are published

We send report cards to the setting after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking. In most circumstances, this will be within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

Settings have 5 working days to comment on the draft report card. They can highlight minor points relating to the clarity and/or factual accuracy. If a setting submits only minor points of clarity or factual accuracy, we consider these and respond to them when we share the final report card. This is normally within 30 working days of the end of the inspection. We may also send the draft report card to the DfE and other bodies. This takes place only after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking.

A setting can also submit a [formal complaint](#) seeking a review of the inspection process, including grades or concerns about inspectors' conduct.

Leaders should share the inspection findings with relevant staff (as determined by the setting), and whoever else they consider appropriate, which may include colleagues, family members, and/or their wider support group; however, the information should not be made public or shared with parents until the setting receives the final report card.

We do not normally issue draft or final report cards to schools or publish final report cards on our website during school holidays.

We normally publish the final report card on our [reports website](#) 5 working days after we send it to the setting.

However, if we are taking enforcement action following the inspection, we serve the setting with a [welfare requirements notice](#). This will usually be served before the draft inspection report card, because the setting needs to take immediate steps to meet requirements and to make sure children are safeguarded.

When we monitor the welfare requirements notice, we always publish an outcome summary to give details about the progress the setting has made. We publish outcome summaries on our reports website.

Support for settings' improvement

After an inspection, we tell the local authority about the outcome shortly before the report card is published on our reports website. This is so that the local authority can provide additional support or training to help settings make the improvements that they need to. Local authorities have a duty to help and support settings.

How to provide feedback about inspection

We invite all settings to take part in a voluntary post-inspection survey. We send a link to the survey with the final copy of the report card. This is to help us improve our inspection work.

How we handle evidence and personal information

Providers are legally required to provide our inspectors with access to information. [Section 77 of the Childcare Act 2006](#) gives them powers of entry, at any reasonable time, to any premises on which registered early years provision is being provided. It gives them a right to inspect, and take copies of, any records kept by the person providing the childcare, and any other documents containing information relating to the provision.

Inspectors also have the power to seize and remove any document or material that may be evidence of a failure to comply with any condition or requirement. They may take measurements and photographs or make recordings to use as evidence. These powers allow inspectors to look at computers and other devices that may hold relevant information.

Inspectors also have the power to interview the provider in private, and interview, in private, other individuals who consent to being interviewed.

Our [privacy policy](#) sets out what personal information we collect in order to inspect a setting, what we do with it, how long we keep it for, and individuals' rights under data protection legislation.

Inspectors record their notes using our systems. They may see information that contains personal information about staff and children, such as registers and plans. They may take notes from, or copies of, this type of supporting information before returning it to an appropriate staff member at the end of the inspection. Any notes, copies or photographs will be stored securely. Inspectors do not retain any inspection notes or supporting information personally. Information gathered electronically using a range of devices, including laptops and Ofsted-registered mobile phones is transferred securely in line with our security

policies. Inspectors may take photographs using their Ofsted-registered mobile phones. For further information, see our [enforcement policy](#).

Inspectors are instructed to use digital methods for recording notes wherever possible. Where handwritten notes are unavoidable due to practical constraints, inspectors are required to transcribe relevant information into the secure system as soon as possible. Once transcribed, all handwritten notes must be securely disposed of in accordance with our retention policy.

Use of Ofsted logos

Settings that we judged to be outstanding or good for overall effectiveness before November 2025 can continue to use the specific Ofsted outstanding or good logos until their next graded inspection. Once they receive their next graded inspection, they must remove those logos, as they relate only to an overall effectiveness judgement, which they will not get as this is no longer part of our grading. For more information, see [our logo terms of use](#).

Research activities on inspection

We may [carry out research](#), based on national priorities, during our inspections. This has no impact on the inspection.

We may use the evidence that inspectors gather during inspections to inform other work, such as national reporting. No personal data obtained as part of the inspection evidence will be used to inform other work.

We may invite settings to take part in research visits (separate from inspections) at other times.

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