

# Briefing

Embargoed until 0001 Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2005

## **Early doors: experiences for children in day care during the first hour of the day.**

### **Introduction**

1. The children of working parents spend a great deal of their time in the daily care of people other than their parents. Ofsted regulates the care given to children aged under 8 through registering providers, carrying out regular inspections, investigating compliance with the National Standards to see whether providers continue to be suitable for registration and taking enforcement action where necessary.
2. But regular inspection only ever gives a snapshot of provision at a particular time. Inspectors normally visit registered provision during core operating hours when the majority of children and staff are present.
3. Fieldwork evidence was suggesting that some nurseries that offer full day care do not promote good quality care throughout all the hours that children attend. In particular there is a belief that staff ratios and the quality of children's experiences are poor at the beginning and the end of the day.

### **Methodology**

4. Ofsted drew together evidence collected from 45 day nurseries during September 2005. Inspectors arrived as the nursery opened and inspected and analysed outcomes for children during the first hour of operation for those spending more than four hours in day care. The nurseries visited were a mix of urban (33), inner city (5) and rural (7).

### **Main Findings**

5. In too many nurseries there are not enough staff on duty at the start of the day to offer good care for children: this was found consistently in one-fifth of the nurseries visited.
6. In a third of the nurseries visited the first hour or more of care lacked sufficient planning and organisation to support the needs of all the children attending.
7. Some practice was unacceptable: in particular, security was weak allowing adults to enter the nursery unchallenged; and, staff not providing children with engaging activities.
8. The best nurseries plan carefully for the difficult transition from home to nursery and make sure that they have extra staff on hand to support both children and their

parents at the start of what is, for many children, a very long day in the paid care of others.

### Organisation of the childcare

9. Good nurseries plan to have sufficient staff at the start of the day to cope with partings from parents. They plan activities to engage interest from first opening, setting these out at the end of the previous day so that the nursery is bright and cheerful, and there is plenty for children to do when they arrive.

*No staff are taken out of the class to 'set up', as this is done at the start and end of the day...the entire nursery is prepared so that staff can greet parents and children.*

10. The majority of nurseries (32) gave children good support in parting from parents. Some operate family groupings, where children of all ages are cared for together at the start of the day, which helps brothers and sisters settle.

*For the first hour the nursery operated family groupings with ...high chairs near the breakfast table to encourage a quiet and calm atmosphere where children enjoyed their chosen breakfast engaging in quiet conversations with staff and their peers.*

11. A third of nurseries (13) had weaknesses in the way they organised childcare to meet the needs of the children attending during the first hour. These weaknesses related to staff deployment and the ineffective grouping of children. They ranged from inadequate ratios, no manager or deputy present, to children being left for too long without adult attention while staff prepared breakfast or attended to other children's needs.

*By 8.30 six babies have arrived, five strapped in chairs. None has any toys or resources to play with.*

*Staff are not clear about their daily roles ... they do not know on a day-to-day basis which room they are working in.*

### Helping children to be healthy

12. Nurseries generally had good arrangements for promoting children's good health. Good handover arrangements with parents meant that nurseries had up to date information about health issues.

*All parents are asked about the current health of their children on arrival and staff write down any concerns where necessary.*

13. Most settings (36) offered breakfast. This ensures children are set up well for the day. Breakfast is mostly cereal and toast with children making their own selections in the best nurseries. Some nurseries offer breakfast clubs to children who are later transported to school. However, in two nurseries children were not offered drinks with breakfast.
14. Three nurseries did not have enough staff to cope with children's personal needs.

*There was only one staff member present ....All children are based downstairs but nappy change facilities are on the first floor.*

### **Helping children stay safe**

15. All nurseries had risk assessments in place. In the best nurseries, staff assess potential hazards at the start of every day using a check list.

*Staff are delegated responsibility for checking risks quickly through a checklist system placed at strategic places such as by the garden door.*

16. All the nurseries had good security systems in theory, but these were not always implemented in practice. In the best nurseries, the manager or another supernumerary staff member monitors the entrance area at busy periods. However, several 'overrode' their security systems in busy periods during the first hour. Unacceptably, in three cases, inspectors were allowed into the nursery without challenge.
17. Inspectors judged three nurseries had insufficient staff to help minimise risks. In one case unvetted staff took children to the toilet. In the other cases staff were under too much pressure setting up the nursery or in preparing breakfast to spend enough time with children.

*In the under 2s room, one member of staff phoned in sick. There were no contingency plans in place.*

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

18. The best nurseries plan the start of the day so that children have plenty to do from the time they arrive.

*Children begin arriving at 0700 and daily routines are in place to ensure that children are appropriately supported from the moment they arrive...All activities are set out the night before with impressive child-accessible storage enabling children to access toys and resources independently.*

19. But too many nurseries (14) either do not sufficiently plan the start of the day or have too few staff to support children in their early start.

*Staff interaction with children was initially limited as they carry out other duties such as completing the register and talking to parents about medication. These are all important but there are not enough staff to sit with children or manage their behaviour. Too often behaviour was managed by calling across a room rather than going over to a child to explain or offer distraction.*

*In the room for children aged 2 to 5 years staff did not start to put toys out until 20 minutes after children arrived.*

20. Although most nurseries offer a balanced day for children, activities at the start of the day are not good enough in over half of the nurseries visited. Children were present for over an hour and in some cases up to two hours before the 'normal' nursery day started.

*The planned nursery day begins at 09.30 so that some children are in the nursery for up to two hours before this time.*

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

21. Nearly all the nurseries visited had good arrangements for exchange of information with parents. This helps children feel valued and nursery staff to understand the needs of individual children. In the best nurseries parents and children are greeted by name and staff spend time talking to parents about anything that might affect the care they offer.

*Staff have exceptional skills in working with parents, placing them at ease while they discuss aspects of the child's day and his or her specific development.*

22. Good nurseries use key workers and have systems to provide reassurance, particularly to parents who are new to the nursery.

*Having the same key staff on duty in the mornings ensures relationships develop and helps children to make smooth transitions between home and the setting.*

*Staff assured a new mum that her baby would be fine and asked her to telephone as many times as she wished to assure herself that he was okay.*

23. Seven nurseries did not spend enough time helping children feel settled or giving reassurance to parents. This was mainly due to lack of staff at key times such as handovers.

*Children who were upset when parents left were sometimes left to cry as the phone had to be answered.*

*A number of infants were upset when leaving their parents ... staff struggled to comfort more than one child (at the same time).*

## **Conclusion**

24. There is evidence that, although the majority of nurseries offer adequate care to children during the first hour of the day, the care that they receive is likely to be of poorer quality than during core hours, with a lack of planning and organisation.
25. It is also likely that the care at the end of an extended day will also be of poorer quality. The weaknesses arising from staff deployment and organisation in the early morning could occur at the end of the day when tidying away activities and cleaning may take staff away from directly working with children.

## Annex A

### Good practice checklist for nurseries during the first hour

1. Plan for the start of the day in the same way that you would plan for the main daily activities. Make sure children have enough to do so that you have time to spend talking to parents, taking the register etc.
2. Set up the nursery the night before so that it is bright and welcoming and you have time to cope with early arrivals.
3. Make sure there is a manager or deputy present, preferably supernumerary to the adult:child ratio to talk to parents, deal with administrative tasks such as answering the telephone and monitor the entrance.
4. Make sure that at least one of the 'early doors' staff has a current first aid qualification.
5. Consider increasing the adult:child ratio above the minimum to better meet the needs of younger children during the first hour, particularly where they are new to the nursery and are having difficulty settling.
6. Consider using key staff who are always present at opening to talk to parents helping to build trusting relationships
7. Make sure that children are given sufficient food and drink, particularly those who have not had breakfast before leaving home.
8. Check the premises each day before children arrive for risks such as cleaning equipment left within reach.
9. Talk to parents about whether there have been any events overnight or earlier in the day that might affect the care you give during the day, such as sleeping patterns, breakfast, and medication.
10. Have secure contingency arrangements for staff who are ill or absent, including sufficient numbers of vetted staff to cope with children's intimate care.