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TOGETHER TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

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TERMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

Throughout this document, the following terms are used:

- 'Pre-school centre' - an inclusive term for nursery schools, nursery units, playgroups, day nurseries or other pre-schools in the statutory, voluntary, private or independent sectors which provide education for children in their pre-school year.
- 'Staff' - the adults who work with the children in pre-school centres, whatever their qualifications.
- 'Teaching' - the skill of the staff in promoting the children's learning and all-round development, and all of the tasks and activities in which they engage as part of this process.
- 'Leader' - the person with overall responsibility for leading the staff in the pre-school centre; this may be the principal of a nursery school; the principal of a primary school with a nursery unit or the teacher in charge of the nursery unit; or the leader, supervisor or person in charge of a playgroup or day nursery.
- 'Parents' - includes parents, those with parental responsibility, or other carers.
- 'Management group' - the management, or proprietor, or Board of Governors responsible for the organisation.
- 'Employing authority' - the organisation (or person) that employs the staff and is responsible for all aspects of employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

This document has been designed to help all those involved with the provision of pre-school education to improve their current practice through a process of self-evaluation. The materials may be used on their own, or with other resources (some of these resources are outlined in Appendix 5, Useful Materials and Publications).

The core aim is to improve the quality of the children's learning and development so that their pre-school education is of the highest possible standard and provides them with a firm foundation for future success in education and throughout life.

¹Three basic questions lie at the heart of self-evaluation:

- ***How are we doing?***
- ***How do we know?***
- ***What action do we need to take to bring about improvement?***

It is recognised that the staff in many centres work with success to develop their provision. It is hoped that these materials will build further on the expertise and commitment of staff, and those who provide them with support and advice, in the processes of self-evaluation leading to self-improvement.

The materials provide guidance on:

- the points to be considered by a pre-school centre that is planning to use the process of self-evaluation;
- the key features of self-evaluation;
- identifying the focus for self-evaluation;
- indicators of quality;
- carrying out the process; and
- planning for action.

¹ The Child at the Centre - Self-evaluation in the early years, Scottish Executive 2000.

It is recognised that many pre-school centres already:

- review and evaluate their work;
- are becoming constructively self-critical;
- recognise where improvements are needed; and
- implement programmes and processes which aim to improve their practice and raise standards.

Documents which have already been published, including 'Evaluating Pre-school Education', 'Evaluating Pastoral Care' and 'Standards for Pre-school Settings', may be helpful to centres and staff who engage in self-evaluation work. The DVD, 'Improvement Through Self-evaluation – Pre-school Education', is designed to help practitioners to reflect on, and improve, the quality of the provision they make for young children. Other organisations have published valuable self-assessment and quality assurance materials, or provide accreditation schemes. Self-evaluation need not be linked exclusively to the quality indicators within this document. The process can utilise a range of quality standards, accreditation schemes and other approaches.

Increasingly within the pre-school sector, there is the realisation that sustained improvement in educational provision requires a culture of self-evaluation to develop within pre-school centres. As a result, self-evaluation should become an integral part of a centre's way of working.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) is committed to developing the place of self-evaluation in inspections. Pre-school centres that recognise their own strengths and areas for improvement are in a better position to gain most benefit from inspection and to continue to develop their provision after the inspection.

2. WHAT IS SELF-EVALUATION?

Self-evaluation is a process which helps the members of staff, and the management group to:

- clarify what the centre is aiming to achieve;
- focus on the quality of the learning and teaching;
- reflect on the current practice;
- identify and celebrate areas where the provision is good and needs to be maintained;
- identify and prioritise areas which need to be improved;
- plan for development;
- engage in personal and shared professional development; and
- raise the standards of the educational provision.

Self-evaluation is a systematic process involving all the staff, the management group, and other members of the centre's community, including parents and children.

The process requires the staff to:

- review their work openly and honestly;
- reflect on the extent to which aims and expectations are being realised; and
- establish a clear vision and future direction for the pre-school centre.

Where it is particularly successful, self-evaluation:

- is ongoing and sharply-focused;
- involves monitoring the effectiveness of the provision;
- informs, and influences positively, the staff's practice and the quality of learning; and
- promotes further development and improvement.

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3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SELF-EVALUATION?

The purpose of self-evaluation is to help the staff of pre-school centres to ensure that the children are provided with the best possible start to their education. In order for children to thrive and develop, a high priority needs to be placed on their sense of security and belonging, and on their all-round well-being.

Self-evaluation should:

- promote effectiveness in pre-school education;
- improve the quality of learning and teaching;
- improve the experiences for the children; and
- raise standards.

Self-evaluation should also:

- help the staff to recognise their own skills and expertise;
- increase the staff's confidence and motivation;
- provide opportunities for personal development and leadership;
- promote teamwork; and
- raise awareness among parents of the centre's aims and the service provided.

It is important that self-evaluation is not regarded as a form of assessment or as a tool for staff appraisal. It should not be introduced to the staff without establishing the essential culture of openness and participation.

These materials provide a framework which may be useful to:

- support individual pre-school centres with the development of their own self-evaluation processes;
- assist the leader, staff, and the management group to draw up and implement effective development plans;
- support the centre in responding to an inspection;
- increase the effectiveness of teamwork;
- assist the staff in addressing change in, for example, the staffing, the enrolment or the curriculum; and
- support action planning to bring about improvement.

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4. IS YOUR PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE READY TO UNDERTAKE SELF-EVALUATION?

The process of self-evaluation requires commitment from all who are involved in the life and work of the centre. Staff, parents and the management group need to evaluate, openly and honestly, the centre's work and their own particular contribution to what is being achieved.

The most important step is to establish a climate where all involved are encouraged to be open about their work. The staff should be able to work together effectively as a team and to take ownership of the self-evaluation process. Everyone, from leaders and managers to the most recently appointed members of staff, should be willing to reflect on the current practice, accept praise and constructive criticism, and make changes where necessary. The recognition of past achievements and of the existing good practice is essential as a foundation for self-evaluation.

Those providing support, advice and guidance to pre-school centres have an important role to play. They may need to help the staff to create a positive climate for self-evaluation and guide them about their readiness to begin the process.

Whatever the circumstances:

- the procedures used should be straightforward and manageable, but also thorough and comprehensive;
- all those involved should be aware of the methods to be used and of their part in the process;
- evidence is needed to support the evaluations made; and
- the outcomes of the self-evaluation should lead to action that improves the children's educational experiences and their learning.

Observations of the children at play and of the staff's involvement are key sources of evidence for self-evaluation. Other evidence will include the centre's policies, planning documents, assessment records and development plans. The views of the children, parents, staff and the members of the management group should be taken into consideration.

Feedback from primary schools about the children's progress in year 1 may also provide useful information as part of the self-evaluation process.

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BEFORE BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF SELF-EVALUATION, THESE POINTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AND DISCUSSED

These points should not be regarded as a checklist. They are designed as prompts for discussion. It is not always necessary to have a complete answer to all of these questions before making a start.

How does the centre intend to build self-evaluation into its normal way of working so that all the staff are involved continuously in improving the quality of the provision?

Has the leader planned carefully to ensure that self-evaluation can be managed within the centre's existing work schedule and the time available?

How is good practice shared and spread throughout the centre?

What is the centre doing already to evaluate the quality of its own provision?

Is there sufficient openness and commitment to improvement among the staff and management to enable them to take part successfully in self-evaluation?

What guidance and support will the centre need to help it develop the process of self-evaluation?

What steps has the centre taken to ensure that all the staff, and the management group, understand the process of self-evaluation?

THE STAFF SHOULD REFLECT ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DESCRIBE THE CENTRE'S WORK

These statements are also designed as prompts for discussion and should not be used simply as a checklist. It is not always necessary for all of these features to be in place before making a start.

Within the centre there is:



5. IDENTIFYING THE FOCUS FOR SELF-EVALUATION

Once the essential culture for self-evaluation has been established, the processes and ways of working developed during the early stages should enable the staff to apply similar methods to any aspect of the centre's provision.

The choice of theme for self-evaluation is very important and should match the stage of development of the staff and the centre.

Some pre-school centres have a tradition of self-evaluation, and the procedures are well embedded in their ethos and ways of working. Many of these centres have identified clearly their priorities for self-evaluation and have built up the necessary skills and confidence to undertake wide-ranging reviews of their work.

Other centres may be at a very early stage in developing the process of self-evaluation. In such centres, there may be situations, such as a relatively new staff or a recently appointed leader, where confidence and openness are just beginning to be established. Such centres may find it helpful to choose a narrowly focused area for their first self-evaluative activity, such as the quality of the learning environment. Initially, small achievable targets should be selected. Centres can then build on the experience gained to examine the findings, to improve their methods of evaluation and to broaden the scope of their evaluation work.

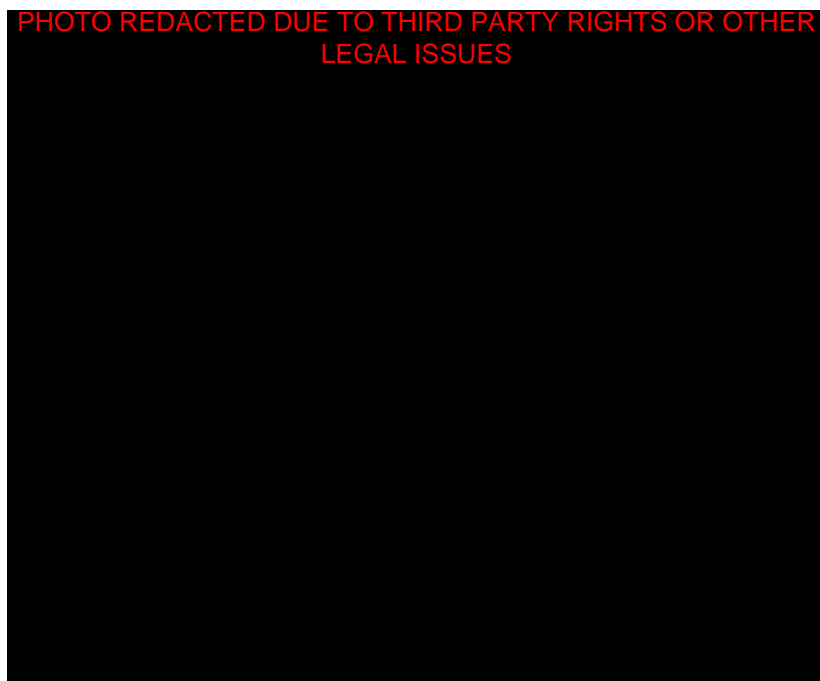
Self-evaluation is a cyclical process as illustrated on page 15. The lessons learned from engaging in the process, even in a limited way, should help all staff to gain the confidence and skills to address more complex or sensitive areas in the future.

Other factors may influence the choice of focus for self-evaluation, including, for example:

- issues raised by viewing the DVD 'Improvement through Self-Evaluation';
- the outcomes of an inspection;
- the use of 'Evaluating Pre-School Education';
- comments from parents or children;
- guidance from advisory/support officers or early years specialists;
- discussion in cluster group meetings; or
- involvement in accreditation schemes or other self-improvement projects.

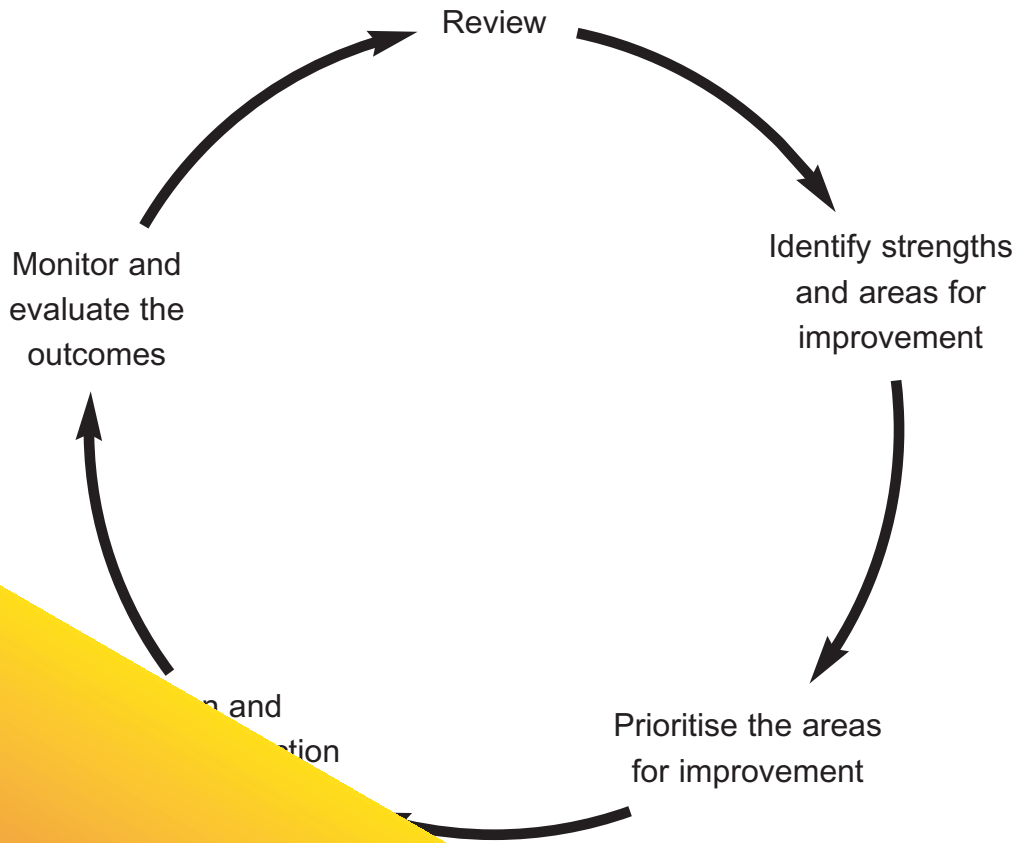
In addition to discussions among the staff, information and feedback from others may help the centre to identify its priorities and the areas which require improvement, particularly in relation to ethos, learning, and teaching.

Although pre-school centres vary in size, all are relatively small communities. It is important, however, that the staff use the time and resources available to them in order to ensure that self-evaluation becomes part of the centre's ethos and of the everyday life and work of the staff.



6. THE PROCESS OF SELF-EVALUATION

In order for a centre to examine the quality and effectiveness of its work, a systematic process of self-evaluation should be designed and adopted as illustrated below.



is set out in pages 43 to 46.

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The Quality Indicators

Throughout the quality indicators, the following terms are used:

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- 'Parents' - includes parents, those with parental responsibility, or other carers.
- 'Management group' - the management, or proprietor, or Board of Governors responsible for the organisation.
- 'Employing authority' - the organisation (or person) that employs the staff and is responsible for all aspects of employment.

The following abbreviations are used:

- CASS - the curriculum, advisory and support services of the education and library boards.
- NIPPA - NIPPA – the Early Years Organisation.
- CCMS - the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.
- DE - the Department of Education.

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The Quality Indicators

In this section there are Quality Indicators to help the pre-school centre to evaluate the quality of its provision.

These indicators are divided into three sections:

- Ethos;
- Learning and Teaching;
- Management.

These sections follow closely the organisation of the document, *Evaluating Pre-School Education*; they provide greater detail within some sections and concentrate on illustrating good practice.

Each of the sections is further divided into individual indicators as set out below:

1. Ethos

- 1.1 Climate of the Pre-school Centre
- 1.2 Links with Parents
- 1.3 Pastoral Care

2. The Learning and Teaching

- 2.1 Planning the Curriculum
- 2.2 The Children's Development and Learning
- 2.3 The Staff's Interaction and Involvement with the Children
- 2.4 Organisation of Sessions
- 2.5 Implementation of the Curriculum
- 2.6 Assessing, Recording and Reporting the Children's Progress in Learning
- 2.7 Provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN)

3. Management

- 3.1 The Effectiveness of the Leader
- 3.2 Organisation and Teamwork
- 3.3 Evaluating the Work of the Pre-school Centre
- 3.4 Action to Improve Learning
- 3.5 Staff Development
- 3.6 Links with Other Pre-school Centres, Schools and Agencies
- 3.7 Accommodation
- 3.8 Resources

On the following pages, **the features** of each individual indicator are set out along with statements about **the characteristics of good practice**. The statements are designed to help the staff to come to a shared understanding of what constitutes effective pre-school provision and to consider the effectiveness of their own practice.

Each individual indicator is listed on a separate page so that it may be easily photocopied for the staff to discuss and decide on the evidence to be collected, and to evaluate the pre-school centre's work against the statements.

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Section 1: Ethos

The discernible, individual and distinctive character, atmosphere and expectations of the centre which enable it to promote the all-round development of its children.

Indicator 1.1: CLIMATE OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Sense of purpose and identity	The staff work to create a climate where mutual trust, respect, confidence and a caring ethos are evident throughout the centre. The parents and the staff demonstrate a strong sense of identity with the centre and its aims.
Quality of the learning environment	The centre provides a welcoming, attractive and stimulating environment which supports the children's learning and celebrates their achievements. The staff pay due attention to safety and security.
Equality and fairness	The centre's policies and practices ensure that all of the children, the parents and the staff are treated equally, with respect, and in a fair and just manner.
Morale and relationships	The morale of staff and children is high; there is a sense of fun and enjoyment. The good relationships at all levels enable the staff and children to work well together in a supportive and purposeful atmosphere. The settling-in period is well paced and provides good opportunities for the staff to develop positive relationships with the parents and to work with individual children, promoting their confidence and co-operation.
Expectations and use of praise	The staff have high but realistic expectations of what can be achieved; these expectations are reflected in the quality of the children's learning and are shared with the parents. The staff use praise appropriately and celebrate the children's achievements. The children have high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They are encouraged to develop independence and to respect one another, the staff, and the centre's environment.
The children's behaviour	The consistent implementation of the behaviour management policy helps the children to understand and co-operate with necessary rules and routines. Where possible, the children are involved in drawing up these rules. The children's play is settled and productive; they are learning to consider the needs and wishes of others and to develop self-discipline and responsibility. The staff respond to challenging behaviour in a constructive, caring and sensitive manner, and in partnership with parents.

Indicator 1.2: LINKS WITH PARENTS

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Relationships with parents	<p>The staff regard the support and contribution of parents as key elements in the success of the pre-school centre. Parents value the work of the centre and feel welcome and secure in approaching the leader and other members of staff. Staff value, and take account of, the parents' knowledge of their children's development, interests and needs.</p>
Communication and information	<p>The parents receive clear information about the aims, policies, organisation and day-to-day life and work of the pre-school centre. There are good opportunities for parents and staff to share information relevant to the children's development and learning. The parents are provided, at frequent intervals, with clear information about their children's progress and achievements. They are encouraged to value the outcomes of their children's play.</p>
Involvement in the children's education	<p>The parents are encouraged to become involved in promoting their children's learning through, for example, the lending of toys and books for use at home. The parents receive the appropriate support in promoting their children's learning through, for example, information events and courses. Steps are taken to involve them actively in relevant aspects of the centre's life. They are given helpful information about the centre's activities and curriculum.</p>
Response to parents' views and enquiries	<p>The views of the parents are sought systematically and are taken into account when the pre-school centre reviews its curriculum, organisation and provision. The staff ensure that parental enquiries or concerns are dealt with sympathetically, promptly and effectively.</p>

Indicator 1.3: PASTORAL CARE

Characteristics of good practice	
Features	
A caring atmosphere	The staff show a strong commitment to the care and well-being of the children. The children feel secure and free from emotional and physical harm; when they have anxieties, they turn confidently to the staff and receive appropriate support and reassurance. The staff are vigilant about the children's well-being, health and safety. They recognise, and deal appropriately with, behaviour which has the potential to become bullying.
Arrangements for ensuring the children's welfare	The centre has comprehensive, appropriate policies on welfare issues including child protection, behaviour management, health and safety matters, and health education. These policies are in line with the latest DE guidance and/or guidance issued by relevant health and social services agencies. The staff adopt practices which ensure that these policies are implemented fully; they actively seek the parents' support in this process. They maintain appropriate records of all accidents and incidents relating to the children's welfare. As a result, the children's personal, social and emotional development is promoted effectively and they gain an awareness of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. The parents are made aware of the centre's approaches to welfare matters, and of the procedures for making enquiries and complaints. There is good liaison, including collaborative working, with relevant health and welfare agencies.
Child protection	The ethos of the centre places the highest priority on protecting the children from harm, abuse and neglect. The staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in protecting the children and they carry out these responsibilities fully and effectively. All of the staff are vetted and have received appropriate training which is updated frequently. The centre implements fully a child protection policy which is in line with the current requirements of DE and with the guidance issued by the relevant Area Child Protection Committee. There is an appropriate induction process for new members of staff; all of the staff adhere to a suitable, written code of conduct which guides their involvement with the children. The parents are well informed about the centre's policy and procedures to ensure child protection.

Section 2: The Learning and Teaching

The skill of the staff in promoting the children's all-round development, and the quality of the children's responses, are at the very heart of a pre-school centre's work. The effectiveness of the teaching influences directly the quality of the children's learning.

Indicator 2.1: PLANNING THE CURRICULUM

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Breadth and balance	The programme of play and other activities is planned to develop all aspects of the pre-school curriculum in line with the agreed Northern Ireland guidance, contained in the document, 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education'. The planning helps to ensure that the children's experiences are stimulating, broad and balanced.
Identification of learning	The planning identifies clearly the potential of the activities and materials to promote the children's all-round development. The learning that the staff intend to promote through their involvement in the play and other activities is highlighted. The planning is understood by all the staff and guides effectively their work with the children. It is adapted flexibly in the light of the children's responses and builds appropriately on their ideas and interests.
Progression	There is effective long-term planning which identifies how the children's experiences and the use of the resources will progress over time. The introduction of new ideas, activities and challenges is planned carefully to promote optimum progression in the children's learning and to help ensure that they experience success.
Meeting individual needs	The staff make effective use of assessment information to identify individual needs and to plan the next steps in learning. Where children remain for more than one year in the centre, the planning takes account of the differing needs of the older and the younger children.
Evaluation	As an integral part of their work, the staff make careful evaluations of the children's responses to the planned activities and of their progress in learning. Plans are compiled, or modified as necessary, to meet the children's needs.

Indicator 2.2: THE CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Features	Characteristics of good practice (in using these characteristics, account needs to be taken of the time of year, and the children's stages of development)
Levels of motivation and attitudes to learning	The children enjoy their activities and play in a settled and productive manner. They are developing self-control and ways of resolving conflicts. They display sustained interest and concentration, and persevere willingly with their activities. They are inquisitive about the world around them and confident in exploring new experiences and situations. They are developing positive attitudes to learning.
Acquisition of characteristics, skills and concepts	All the children are making good progress in learning in line with their age, ability and stage of development; the majority display the characteristics and skills described in the document, 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education'. They are developing appropriate language and communication skills, physical abilities, creativity, awareness of mathematical ideas, and understanding of, and sense of wonder about, the world. They display good personal and social skills, and appropriate emotional development.
Development as independent learners	The children make choices and decisions with confidence. They can express and develop their own ideas, sometimes initiating and leading activities. They are learning strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning and can begin to solve problems for themselves. They are increasingly independent in their use of equipment and materials. They actively seek information from adults, other children and/or a range of resources.
Interaction with others	The children feel secure and cared-for. They relate well to adults and children and are forming friendships. They can share materials and resources with others during play and are developing the ability to co-operate in groups. They are learning to listen and to consider the ideas and wishes of others. They are becoming effective communicators.

Indicator 2.3: THE STAFF'S INTERACTION AND INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CHILDREN

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Climate for learning	<p>The staff create a purposeful, stimulating, supportive and safe environment in the centre. They motivate the children and engage them actively in learning through play. They foster trusting relationships and encourage the children to show consideration for others. Within this productive climate, and as a result of observing and listening to the children, the staff encourage the children's own ideas and self-chosen play. They value the children's ideas, efforts and achievements and use praise appropriately.</p>
Effectiveness in promoting learning	<p>The staff's interaction and involvement with the children support the children's chosen activities and intentions. They make skillful use of a range of approaches in order to exploit the potential of the play and other activities to promote the children's learning. Their approaches include participating alongside the children, helping the children to realise and develop their own ideas, suggesting new directions for play, helping the children to develop new skills or techniques, acting as role models and leading group activities. They encourage the children to observe, to experiment, to ask questions, to solve problems, to reason, to imagine, and to express their feelings and ideas. Their use of questions is well judged and effectively extends the children's language and promotes their understanding.</p>
Meeting the needs of the children	<p>The staff's expectations are realistically high and are reflected in plans for learning which are appropriate to the children's differing stages of development, abilities and interests. The activities, and the staff's involvement with the children, are matched well to the needs of individual children, including those with special needs. The staff provide necessary support for the children's learning, and extend experiences as appropriate to ensure that the children are motivated and challenged.</p>

Indicator 2.4: ORGANISATION OF SESSIONS

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Range and balance of experiences and activities	The children have free access to a wide range of equipment and materials and a good balance of stimulating activities, both indoors and outdoors. The staff provide a well-judged blend of opportunities for the children to engage in free play and for them to participate in appropriate group experiences directed by adults. There is a suitable level of supervision; appropriate account is taken of health and safety matters in the organisation of all the activities.
Use of time	The best possible use is made of the available time to promote learning; all aspects of the pre-school programme are given appropriate attention. There are sustained periods of uninterrupted play and suitable opportunities for music, rhymes, story reading and telling, and energetic play indoors and outdoors.
Appropriateness of daily routines	The daily sessions flow smoothly. The children's play is not interrupted unnecessarily. The routines are organised efficiently and unobtrusively; the need for queuing is avoided. Snack and meal times are used effectively as opportunities for learning. The organisation of the routines fosters the children's sense of security. It also encourages them to become independent and to develop a sense of responsibility for the centre's environment.
Visits	All visits to places outside of the centre's own premises are planned carefully to support the educational programme and extend the children's opportunities for learning. The staff carry out a prior assessment of the possible risks and make appropriate arrangements to ensure the children's safety. The children gain maximum benefit from the centre's organised visits.

Indicator 2.5: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Breadth and balance in the range of experiences provided for the children	The curriculum is based on learning through play; there is an appropriate emphasis on fun and enjoyment. The programme is broad and balanced and is fully in line with Northern Ireland guidance for pre-school education. It caters well for the range of children's ages, stages of development, interests, strengths and needs, and provides for their growing independence as learners. There are appropriate learning opportunities that promote the children's personal and emotional development, social skills, language and communication, physical abilities, creativity, awareness of mathematical ideas, and understanding of, and sense of wonder about, the world.
Progression within the curriculum	The programme introduces progressively more complex, varied and extensive ideas and experiences which extend the children's learning and development. These experiences provide an appropriate sense of challenge and success. Where children spend more than one year in the pre-school centre, the programme ensures that their experiences continue to progress appropriately.
The role of the staff	The staff understand, and implement fully, the centre's planned curriculum. The high quality of their involvement in the children's play and activities ensures that all aspects of the children's development are promoted effectively and that they make appropriate progress.

Indicator 2.6: ASSESSING, RECORDING AND REPORTING THE CHILDREN'S PROGRESS IN LEARNING

Features	Characteristics of good practice
The quality of the assessment strategies	The centre has a clearly understood, and consistently implemented, system for monitoring and assessing the children's progress and development. The staff regard assessment as an essential part of their planning and teaching. As the staff interact with the children at play, they observe and evaluate the children's stages of development and their progress in learning.
The children's records and the use made of them	The information from observation and monitoring is recorded systematically and contributes to an accurate profile of each child's progress and achievements. The system used is manageable and provides information which is easily accessed. The staff use the assessment information effectively to identify the needs of individual children and to meet these needs through the planned educational programme.
The communication with parents and others	The staff provide regular and comprehensive information to parents, both orally and in written form, which reflects clearly the children's progress and achievement. The procedures encourage the parents to participate in promoting their children's learning and to support the centre's educational programme. Following discussions with the parents, appropriate assessment information is passed to the primary schools to which the children transfer.

Indicator 2.7: PROVISION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

Characteristics of good practice	
Features	
Staff expertise and training	A member of staff takes overall responsibility for the centre's SEN provision. This person has undertaken appropriate training/staff development. He/she has a good understanding of the centre's responsibility to meet the children's special needs and of all relevant statutory requirements. A high proportion of the other members of staff have attended training or undertaken staff development for SEN. Expertise within the staff is shared to ensure that good provision is made for the children. All members of staff recognise their responsibilities for meeting the children's needs.
Organisation of special educational needs	Suitable structures have been established to ensure that the centre meets its responsibilities for children with special needs. There is a comprehensive policy on, and appropriate procedures for, SEN provision. All members of staff understand and implement the centre's SEN policy and procedures. Effective links are maintained with other professionals and support agencies. When there is a concern about a child's development and/or behaviour, the parents are informed promptly and are involved fully in all decisions taken about the provision of support.
Identification and planning for special educational needs	In liaison with the parents, the centre identifies the specific needs of individual children. Where necessary, the process is supported by specialist advice and guidance. The information gained is used to plan provision which matches closely the children's identified needs and is coordinated effectively. Where needed, clear and realistic plans are compiled for individual children through appropriate consultation with parents, other staff and relevant outside agencies.

Indicator 2.7: PROVISION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) continued

Features	Characteristics of good practice
<p>Suitability and effectiveness of the provision</p>	<p>Within the centre, there is a climate of respect for others, including those with disabilities or learning difficulties. The children with special needs are integrated as fully as possible with the other children and into the centre's programme of activities. They experience a broad programme in which there is a suitable blend of individual support activities and opportunities to choose freely and interact with peers. The children are confident, motivated, and suitably supported and challenged; they are making progress in learning. The staff's expectations of the children are realistic, and based on recognition of their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Parents are involved fully and are encouraged to support the centre's work with their children. Where finances are allocated for SEN, the centre makes appropriate use of the funding. There are adequate resources which are used to support and enhance the children's learning.</p>
<p>Effectiveness of the record-keeping and review process</p>	<p>Suitably detailed records are maintained for individual children, identifying the progress being made. There are regular reviews to ensure that the children are benefiting from the programme of support and are making discernible progress, and to identify further provision needed. Where necessary, alternative strategies are introduced, and/or further guidance sought from specialists. The parents are given detailed information about their children's progress.</p>
<p>Links with primary and/or special schools</p>	<p>Following discussions with the parents, comprehensive information about the children's needs is shared with the schools to which the children will transfer. The relevant teachers are encouraged to visit the centre and to become familiar with the children's support programmes. This liaison enables the schools to make appropriate provision for the children when they transfer to year 1 classes.</p>

Section 3: Management

Learning and teaching are supported and enhanced by efficient and effective management arrangements. These are essentially the responsibility of the leader, in collaboration with the management group or the proprietor. At their best, these arrangements ensure that the contribution of each member of staff is valued, that relationships among staff are harmonious and that morale is high. Further, all children gain optimum benefit from the range of resources, human and material, available to the centre.

Indicator 3.1: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LEADER

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Leadership qualities	The leader inspires confidence and respect among the children, staff, and parents, and promotes in them a sense of their own worth. He/she provides a good role model for the staff, promotes high standards and sets a positive tone for the work of the centre. The leader provides clear and realistic direction based on a sound knowledge of, and vision for, the centre. Goals and expectations of what the centre can achieve for its children are shared with all the staff and with the management group. The leader is active in promoting the personal and professional development of all the staff.
Professional and management competence	The leader has a sound understanding of children's development and learning and is committed to his/her personal professional development. The leader evaluates regularly and objectively the work of the centre as a basis for improving provision. When difficult decisions are required, these are taken in a timely and positive manner. He/she manages efficiently the time, staffing and other resources, in order to meet the centre's needs and implement its priorities.
Relationships and communication	The leader maintains very good relationships with the children, staff and parents, and communicates effectively with them, and with others involved in the work of the centre. The leader motivates others, values the contribution of all the staff, and promotes effective teamwork. Through good communication with other organisations and agencies, the leader ensures that the children gain full benefit from appropriate funding sources available to the centre.

Indicator 3.2: ORGANISATION AND TEAMWORK

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Staffing and deployment	<p>There are sufficient qualified and skilled staff to meet the statutory requirements, implement an appropriate pre-school curriculum and meet the needs of the children, including those with SEN. Staff are deployed effectively in ways that make good use of their expertise. The deployment of staff gives the highest priority to the needs and well-being of the children and ensures that an appropriate adult/child ratio is maintained. A suitable policy on the training, support and deployment of students, trainees and volunteers is implemented. It reflects a planned approach to the experiences provided for these staff.</p>
Sense of community	<p>All the staff, and the members of the management group, are involved appropriately in the centre's life and work. They contribute to, have a shared understanding of, and display commitment to, the aims, policies, and plans for development. Their different roles and responsibilities are understood clearly.</p>
Teamwork	<p>There is an effective staff team who work closely together in planning, implementing, evaluating and developing the programme of learning. As appropriate, members of the management group join with the staff team in these activities. There is a sense of mutual trust and openness. The staff are supportive of one another; they share ideas and expertise willingly.</p>

Indicator 3.3: EVALUATING THE WORK OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the centre's provision	<p>There are systematic and manageable procedures that enable the staff to reach valid conclusions about the quality of the centre's provision. These procedures may include, for example, the use of the DVD 'Improvement through Self-Evaluation', Inspectorate reports on pre-school education, and/or guidance materials provided by CASS, CCMS, NIPPA or other support agencies. Planning documents, assessment information, observations of the play sessions and the views of staff, management group, children and parents, are included as sources of evidence about the effectiveness of the centre's provision.</p>
Involvement of the staff and the management group	<p>The centre's ethos supports the process of self-evaluation. There is a sense of openness and trust among the staff. All the staff, and the members of the management group, accept and understand the need for careful evaluation of the quality of the centre's provision. They reflect in a constructively self-critical way on their own practice, and collaborate as a team to monitor and evaluate the work of the centre as a whole.</p>
Effectiveness of the action taken	<p>The outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation are used to modify and improve the centre's educational provision and the children's learning. The management group ensures that the staff are supported appropriately in taking necessary action.</p>

Indicator 3.4: ACTION TO IMPROVE LEARNING

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Identification of priorities	<p>The staff, with the appropriate support of members of the management group, identify systematically the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. Their conclusions are based primarily on observations of the quality of the children's play and experiences, and assessment of their progress in learning. The staff determine appropriate priorities for action and identify targets which emphasise improvements in the children's all-round development. The support and advice provided to the staff by CASS officers or the centre's early years specialist help them to identify appropriate priorities. The support and advice are well-matched to the staff's needs and to those of the centre as a whole.</p>
Planning for improvement	<p>Strategies to address the centre's priorities for development are identified and incorporated into a staged and coherent plan. This plan includes details of the targets set, the action to be taken, the staff involved, the timescale set, the resources required and the success criteria to be used. The staff and the management group endorse the plan, and are aware of, and accept, the implications which the proposed actions have for their own work and responsibilities.</p>
Implementation of plans	<p>The leader, and the members of the management group, take responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the plan, including the allocation of necessary time and resources. The staff are involved fully in, and demonstrate their commitment to, the implementation process. Required action is taken in line with the planned timescales and resource allocations and good progress is made towards achieving the targets set.</p>
Review procedures	<p>Appropriate evidence related to the priorities and targets is collected, analysed and used to determine the effectiveness of the planned actions. Success is recognised and celebrated, and suitable areas for further development are identified and addressed.</p>

Indicator 3.5: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Improving the expertise and professional understanding of staff	The leader consults with individual members of staff to identify their development needs. Where appropriate, the leader encourages staff members to improve their expertise and acquire further qualifications which have both professional and personal benefits.
Meeting the priorities of the centre	The priorities for staff development are identified clearly and are matched closely to the needs of the centre as outlined in the development plan. These priorities are met effectively through appropriate training and development opportunities. The centre's policy is sufficiently flexible to address specific staff development needs which may arise outside of the development plan. Time is available and managed effectively to facilitate staff development.
Effect of staff development on learning and teaching	There is clear evidence that the training and staff development undertaken have improved the quality of the learning and teaching within the centre. The staff share together the ideas and expertise gained through training and development, to the benefit of all the children.

Indicator 3.6: LINKS WITH OTHER PRE-SCHOOL CENTRES, SCHOOLS AND AGENCIES

Features	Characteristics of good practice
<p>Range, purpose and effectiveness of contacts with: other early childhood provision, primary schools, and other educational establishments</p>	<p>The centre has well-developed links with other early childhood provision and with local primary schools. The links focus successfully on promoting the children's personal, social and emotional well-being; they help to ensure that there is continuity and progression in educational experiences, when the children transfer to other centres or schools. Relevant information about the children's learning and development is exchanged, so that their personal and educational needs can be met effectively. Where the centre provides placements for students and/or trainees, there are effective links with training organisations and/or institutions of further and higher education. These links ensure that the support and training opportunities provided in the centre meet the students/trainees needs.</p>
<p>the wider community</p>	<p>The centre contributes to the life of the community through, for example, links with community or charitable organisations. The staff make effective use of appropriate facilities that exist within the community to extend the children's experiences and learning.</p>
<p>statutory and support agencies</p>	<p>The centre maintains effective links with relevant professionals, and voluntary and statutory organisations. These may include, for example, medical and health services, educational psychologists, early years organisations, health and social services trusts, officers from employing authorities, and curriculum, advisory and support officers. The advice and help of these professionals are sought appropriately and are used to the benefit of the children and staff.</p>

Indicator 3.7: ACCOMMODATION

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Sufficiency, quality and appropriateness	The accommodation provides adequate space and facilities for play both indoors and outdoors. It provides a safe, pleasant and stimulating environment, well suited to the needs of young children and the work of the staff. The accommodation is clean and is in a good state of decoration and repair. Access is suitable for the needs of all users.
Safety and security	The premises and outdoor areas, including car-parking space, are secure and safe. The access of visitors is monitored and controlled. There are safe arrangements for the arrival and departure of children and parents. There is a comprehensive and clearly understood policy on safety and security, including fire procedures. This policy is implemented consistently. Regular risk assessments are completed for the premises and action is taken promptly to minimise any risks identified. Fixtures, fittings and furniture match the needs of young children; they are of high quality and in good condition, and, where applicable, conform to relevant ² safety standards and/or regulations.
Use made of accommodation	All the available accommodation and facilities are used effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of the children, staff and parents. The children's use of the space indoors and outdoors is well supervised and the staff take effective steps to safeguard their health and safety.

² Advice about current safety standards and regulation should be obtained from the relevant Education and Library Board or Health and Social Services Trust.

Indicator 3.8: RESOURCES

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Sufficiency, quality and appropriateness	<p>The acquisition of resources is managed effectively. The range and quality of resources within the centre as a whole, within individual playrooms, and for the outdoor areas, are sufficient to meet the needs of the children in all aspects of the pre-school curriculum and throughout their pre-school education. The resources are adequate to support the staff's efforts to provide motivating and challenging activities throughout the year.</p>
Suitability and safety	<p>The resources are of suitable design and condition, well maintained, and, where applicable, conform to relevant³ safety standards and/or regulations. The resources available to the children are appropriate to the children's ages and stages of development. The resources are stored safely in a way that enables the children and staff to have appropriate access to them. The children learn how to use resources safely and independently.</p>
Use made	<p>The staff use the resources skillfully to provide motivating and challenging activities throughout the year. The use made of the resources supports the implementation of a broad and balanced programme of play that progresses appropriately.</p>

³ Advice about current safety standards and regulation should be obtained from the relevant Education and Library Board or Health and Social Services Trust.



Guidance on Carrying Out Self-Evaluation

Using Quality Indicators

The indicators provide statements describing practice of a high quality. These statements are not designed to be used as a checklist. They should help the staff to come to a shared understanding of what constitutes effective pre-school provision and to consider their own practice. The statements are not exhaustive; staff may want to add to them.

The quality indicators play a key role in the self-evaluation process.

They can help the staff to:

- evaluate the centre's performance against a set of criteria;
- highlight the areas of their work that are going well;
- identify areas which require more detailed consideration; and
- decide on the areas for improvement.

Centres need to select the indicator/s which best match their priorities for self-evaluation. They may wish to consider all of the features within the indicator/s selected or to have a narrower focus on just some of the features. The statements describing good practice can then be used to help the staff to ask key questions about their own work.

Centres using these materials will be at differing stages in undertaking self-evaluation and in developing the quality of their provision. Centres who are at more advanced stages may want to use the quality indicators in different ways to those who are taking the first steps in the process.

The indicators can be used for different purposes, including:

- monitoring, evaluating and highlighting a centre's achievements;
- evaluating, in depth, a specific aspect of provision;
- carrying out a full review of the whole centre;
- strengthening the centre's development planning; or
- helping the staff to evaluate the success of the action taken to bring about improvement.

Some examples of how the Quality Indicators might be used.

1. A centre may wish to consider the provision within a broad area of their work, for example, the ethos of the centre, and to select all the relevant quality indicators. In this case the staff would select:

- **1.1 Climate of the Pre-school Centre**
- **1.2 Links with Parents**
- **1.3 Pastoral Care**

They could then consider all of the features within these three quality indicators and all of the accompanying statements about good practice.

2. Another centre may wish to concentrate on a more specific area of their provision, for example, the quality of their work with parents, and to select just the one quality indicator, '**1.2 Links with Parents**', for consideration. The staff may then reflect on the features within this indicator, and the accompanying statements of good practice, to inform their self-evaluation.

The features within 'Links with Parents' are:

- Relationships with parents;
- Communication and information;
- Involvement in the children's education;
- Response to parents' views and enquiries.

3. Where a centre is at a very early stage of development, the staff may wish to keep to a narrow focus for their self-evaluation. In evaluating their work with parents, the staff may, for example, decide to concentrate only on one feature, '**communication and information**'. They would then consider the characteristics of good practice for this feature and apply them to the centre's work.

It is hoped that all centres will be able to broaden the scope of their self-evaluation over time and to make increasingly wide use of all the quality indicators.

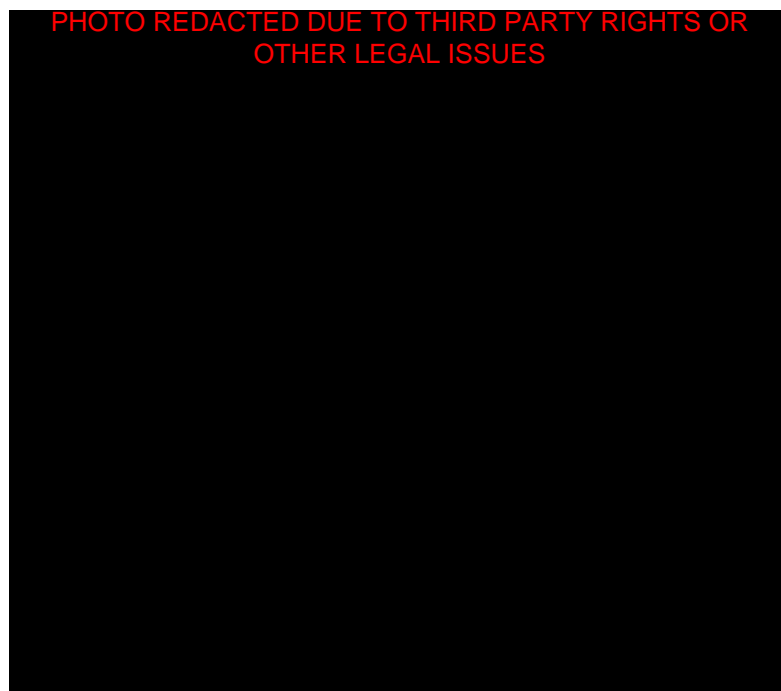
Making a Start

When considering a specific aspect of the provision, the staff need to select the quality indicator/s which best match the aspect they wish to review. It is important that the staff do not attempt to undertake work on too many issues at the same time. The time available, and the period over which the review is to take place, need to be considered from the outset. It is usually more effective for centres to make firm decisions about the time scale and to work towards a deadline.

When selecting the aspect to evaluate, the staff may wish to consider the following criteria:

- previously identified strengths or areas for improvement;
- aspects of the provision identified from a centre-wide review;
- areas for improvement identified during an inspection;
- areas of the provision not covered so far within the regular review process;
- factors relating to national or local initiatives; or
- an aspect of particular interest to parents, such as pastoral care.

The stages in the self-evaluation process are outlined in the following diagram.



Stage 1: Select the specific area for evaluation.

Select the area on which you wish to focus using the criteria suggested or other factors.

Stage 2: Identify the Quality Indicator.

Identify the appropriate Quality Indicator to reflect the area you decide to evaluate.

Look at the features within the indicator and select those you wish to use.

Stage 3: Ask appropriate questions.

Consider the statements about good practice within the quality indicator and devise questions you might ask as part of your evaluation. Rewording the statements will help you to generate useful questions.

Stage 4: Discuss these questions, outline the evidence you have and determine the additional information or evidence you require.

Think about the evidence you already have in, for example, the planning or assessment records. Think about what else you could gather through, for example, making some observations in the playroom.

Stage 5: Gather and evaluate the evidence.

Consider and discuss what the evidence tells you about the quality of the provision and summarise your findings and conclusions.

Stage 6: Keep a record of the evaluation.

Ensure you keep track of your findings and decisions and make this available to all team members.

Stage 7: Decide what the centre is going to do now.

The findings of the evaluation should be used to improve the quality of the provision and the children's experiences. Identify your target(s) for improvement and set out the action to be taken.

STAGES IN THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

Stage 1: Select the specific area for evaluation.

Select the area on which you wish to focus using the suggested criteria or other factors.

The staff of a pre-school centre decide to focus on improving the learning environment.

EXAMPLE OF USING THE STAGES TO UNDERTAKE SELF-EVALUATION

Stage 7: Decide what the centre is going to do now.

Planning for improvement.

The findings of the evaluation should be used to improve the quality of the provision and the children's experiences. Identify your targets for improvement.

The staff identify their targets and set out the action to be taken.

The targets are:

- to ensure that the playroom is always stimulating and attractive to the children;
- to ensure that all play areas are used frequently;
- to attract the children's interest and attention by arranging equipment at a suitable height;
- to use the displays effectively to promote learning;
- to encourage the children to display their own work.

Taking action

The staff use an action plan to help them implement change and monitor their progress towards achieving the target/s.

The action to be taken may be set out as suggested in the document included as Appendix 4 'Action Plans Guidance for Pre-school Centres'.

Stage 2: Identify the Quality Indicator.

Identify the appropriate Quality Indicator to reflect the area you decide to evaluate.

The staff select the Indicator:

1.1 Climate of the Pre-School Centre

Look at the features within the indicator and select those you wish to use.

The features for Climate of the Pre-School Centre are:

- sense of purpose and identity;
- quality of the learning environment;
- equality and fairness;
- morale and relationships;
- expectations and use of praise;
- the children's behaviour.

The centre wishes to evaluate:

- the quality of the learning environment.

Stage 5: Gather and evaluate the evidence.

Consider and discuss what the evidence tells you about the quality of the provision.

The staff conclude that:

- the parents feel the centre is welcoming;
- there is a good supply of equipment and materials;
- the layout of the playroom makes good use of the space;
- the layout does not take enough account of what the children experience when they come into the room;
- the displays are very attractive but are not used enough by the children or the staff;
- most of the equipment is used well but some items could be set out more attractively;
- there are too few examples of the children's own work on display.

Stage 3: Ask appropriate questions.

Consider the statements about good practice and devise questions you might ask as part of your evaluation.

Having looked at the statements for 'the quality of the learning environment', the staff devise these questions:

- How welcoming is the centre's environment?
- How attractive and stimulating is the environment?
- What do the children see and experience when they come into the playroom?
- How does the environment support learning?
- How do we celebrate the children's achievements?
- How much attention do the staff pay to safety and security?

Stage 4: Discuss these questions, outline the evidence you have and determine the additional information or evidence you require.

The staff decide to look at:

- the planning documents to see how the playroom has been set up over the year and what equipment and materials have been used;
- the range of equipment and materials available throughout the centre;
- the range of children's work on display currently;
- the photographs of the children's play that they have taken over the year;
- the incident book for records of accidents.

The staff think about what other evidence they could gather. As a start, they decide to:

- take photographs of the playroom from the children's eye level;
- observe the children's responses when they come into the playroom;
- monitor how the children explore, and ask questions about, the displays;
- observe how the children use the tools and equipment;
- monitor any play areas that are not used frequently by the children;
- have a staff discussion about safety rules and how they are promoted;
- find out the parents' views of how welcoming the centre is.

They devise a variety of ways to record their evidence.

Stage 6: Keep a record of the evaluation.

Ensure that you keep track of your findings and decisions.

The staff decide to use a system for grading their provision. They use the suggested grades below:

Grade	Criteria	Questions
1	Significant strengths	Do the staff pay attention to safety and security? Grade 1
2	Strengths outweigh shortcomings	Is the centre's environment attractive and stimulating? Grade 2
3	Shortcomings outweigh strengths	What are the children's experiences when they come into the playroom? Grade 2
4	Significant shortcomings	How does the environment support learning? Grade 2
		How do we celebrate the children's achievements? Grade 3
		They grade the questions they asked of themselves as follows:
		Is the centre's environment welcoming? Grade 1

A further example of the stages to undertake self-evaluation is included in Appendix 1.

An example of blank and completed sheets which may be used to record evidence and illustrate the outcomes of the evaluation are provided at Appendices 2 and 3.

Action for Improvement

Action planning is a valuable process in taking forward the areas for development and is addressed more fully in the booklets, 'School Development Planning', and 'Action Plans, Guidance for Pre-school Centres' (see Appendix 4).

The action a centre is going to take needs to be agreed by all involved, and should set out clearly the:

- improvement intended in the children's learning and experiences;
- action to be taken to bring about the improvement;
- strategies for monitoring and evaluating how the actions are being implemented;
- criteria to be used to recognise when the action has been successful;
- staff who will be involved;
- time the process will take; and
- resources needed, including staff development and training.

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OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Conclusion

Self-evaluation should increase the staff's confidence and expertise and enable them to celebrate their strengths and successes.

The process should also bring about improvements in the children's experiences and in the quality of the learning and teaching.

The Inspectorate has long recognised that the greatest chance for improvement, likely to be sustained over time, occurs when an organisation has established a positive culture and commitment to professional growth, and takes stock of the quality of its provision.

The Inspectorate report, 'Begin With Quality', concludes with this statement.

'It is for those who work directly with the children to make improvements in their educational experiences and their progress in learning and development. A clear and well-informed view of their own strengths and shortcomings, reached through self-evaluation, and suitable strategies for making improvements, would enable centres to participate more fully in the inspection process and to ensure that they are making steady progress in raising their own standards'.

The aim of this document is to help and encourage all those involved in pre-school education to begin, or continue, the journey towards effective self-evaluation.

⁴ A Common Framework for Inspection: The Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (2003).

⁵ Begin With Quality, The Pre-school Expansion Programme: The Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (2002).

Appendices

Stage 1: Select the specific area for evaluation.

Select the area on which you wish to focus using the criteria suggested or other factors.

Stage 7: Decide what the centre is going to do now.

The findings of the evaluation should be used to improve the quality of the provision and the children's experiences. Identify your target(s) for improvement and set out the action to be taken.

For example, the targets you set might be:

- to include in the weekly planning details of how the needs of individual children will be met;
- to draw up specific plans for the children with special needs;
- to prepare guidance for the staff on a range of possible ways to extend play activities;
- to develop the staff's skills in building on the children's ideas and interests.

Taking action

The action to be taken may be set out as suggested in the document included as Appendix 4 'Action Plans Guidance for Pre-school Centres'.

Stage 6: Keep a record of the evaluation.

Ensure you keep track of your findings and decisions.

The evidence you are building up should be recorded so that a decision can be reached on the quality of the provision in the aspect being evaluated.

At this stage, the staff may wish to use the following criteria to allocate a grade to the aspect being evaluated.

Grade Criteria

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Significant strengths |
| 2 | Strengths outweigh shortcomings |
| 3 | Shortcomings outweigh strengths |
| 4 | Significant shortcomings |

An example of blank and completed sheets which may be used to record evidence and illustrate the outcomes of the evaluation are provided at Appendices 2 and 3.

Stage 2: Identify the Quality Indicator.

Identify the appropriate Quality Indicator to reflect the area you decide to evaluate.

In this example it is:

Indicator 2.3: Quality of the Staffs Interaction and Involvement.

Look at the features within the indicator and select those you wish to use.

The features are:

- Climate for learning.
- Range and appropriateness of the staff's interaction and involvement.
- Meeting the needs of the children.

The first area you might evaluate is:

Meeting the needs of the children.

APPENDIX 1 A FURTHER EXAMPLE OF THE STAGES TO UNDERTAKE SELF-EVALUATION

Stage 5: Gather and evaluate the evidence.

You may, for example, decide to gather evidence through:

- observation in the playroom;
- a review of planning; and
- a scrutiny of the children's records/profiles of progress.

Consider and discuss what the evidence tells you about the quality of the provision and summarise your findings and conclusions.

You may, for example, conclude that:

- the staff are using effective methods for identifying the children's individual stages of development, abilities and needs;
- the assessment information is not used as well as it could be to design play activities and experiences that extend, or support, individual children's development and learning;
- insufficient attention is given to planning how children with special needs will be supported in their play;
- while most children display an interest in the activities, some children quickly exhaust the potential of the play materials and become less settled, and others adopt too passive an approach to their play;
- while the staff are aware that the children's play is not as well developed as it should be, they are unsure about how to improve matters.

Stage 3: Ask appropriate questions.

Consider the characteristics about good practice and devise questions you might ask as part of your evaluation.

For example:

- Do the staff have a clear understanding of individual children's stage of development, ability and need for support?
- Do the planned play experiences and anticipated learning outcomes reflect the staff's understanding of the children as individuals?
- Do the activities motivate and challenge the children appropriately?
- Do the staff support and extend the play experiences effectively in order to foster the learning of individual children?

Stage 4: Discuss these questions, outline the evidence you have and determine the additional information or evidence you require.

For the sample feature, 'Meeting the needs of the children', you may wish to look at the following areas.

- the methods staff use to identify the children's stages of development and progress in learning;
- the use of this information to inform the planning of activities;
- how the weekly or monthly planning takes account of the children's differing needs and interests;
- the appropriateness of the play activities for different ages and abilities within the group;
- the level of challenge in the activities for children of all ages and abilities;
- what the staff do to support or extend the play of individual children.

Agree on how you might find evidence of these aspects.

For example you may decide to:

- examine the records of individual children's progress in learning;
- review the weekly and monthly planning;
- observe the quality of individual children's play;
- look at the written observations the staff make of children's play;
- invite a 'critical friend' to observe the staff's methods of supporting play activities.

**Appendix 2
EVALUATION RECORDING SHEET**

Indicator:

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Evidence	
Strengths	
Areas for improvement	

Grade

Appendix 3: Examples of Completed Evaluation Recording Sheets

Sample 1 Indicator 1.1 Climate of the Pre-School Centre

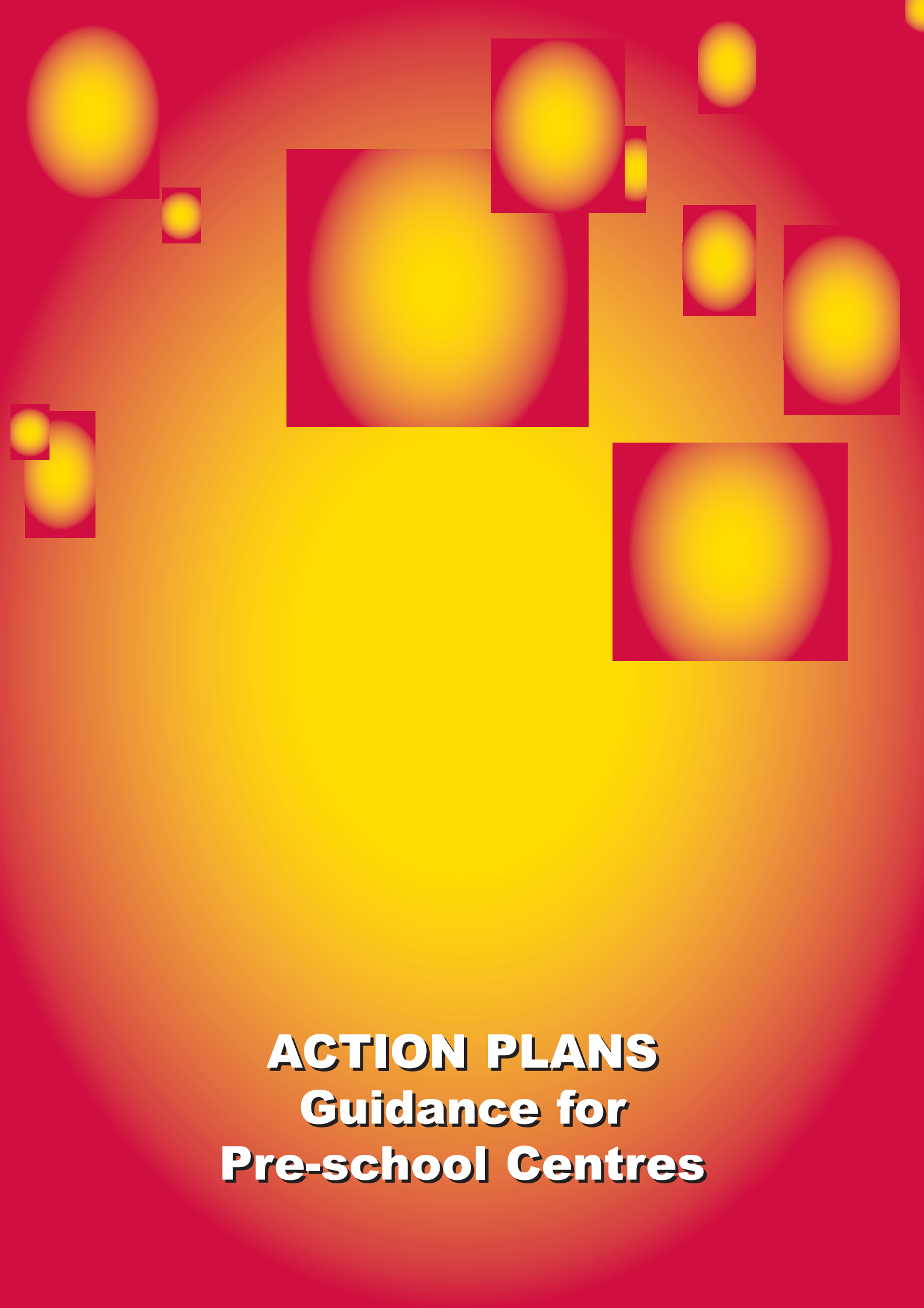
Characteristics of good practice	
Features	The centre provides a welcoming, attractive and stimulating environment which supports the children's learning and celebrates their achievements. The staff pay due attention to safety and security.
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of planning documents. ➤ Observations in the playground. ➤ Audit of equipment and materials. ➤ Review of displays. ➤ Photographs. ➤ Records of accidents. ➤ Parents' questionnaires and comments. <p>Findings and conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Parents' comments and questionnaires show that they feel that the centre is welcoming. ➤ The planning shows that the layout of the playground is well thought out and makes good use of the space. ➤ Observations in the playground show that some play areas are avoided by the children and that displays are not used well enough. ➤ The photographs show some of the materials are not easily accessible to the children. ➤ The accident records confirm that the equipment is used safely.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The centre has a welcoming environment. ➤ There is good use of the equipment and space. ➤ A high priority is given to the safe use of equipment.
Areas for improvement	<p>The staff need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ensure that all play areas are stimulating and attractive to the children; ➤ present the play materials so that they are easily accessible to the children; ➤ arrange the displays so that the children can explore the items, and encourage them to do so; ➤ ensure that they refer to the displays of work and other items as they interact with the children.

Grade

Examples of Completed Evaluation Recording Sheets
Sample 2 Indicator 2.3: The Staff's Interaction and Involvement with the Children

Features	Characteristics of good practice
Meeting the needs of the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The staff's expectations are realistically high and are reflected in plans for learning which are appropriate to the children's differing stages of development, abilities and interests. The activities, and the staff's involvement with the children, are matched well to the needs of individual children, including those with special needs. The staff provide necessary support for the children's learning, and extend experiences as appropriate to ensure that the children are motivated and challenged.
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of the planning documents and assessment records, and the links between the planning and assessment methods. ➤ Review of the resources available to the children and the level of challenge in the activities for children of all ages and abilities. ➤ Observation of the staff's interaction with the children and the children's responses to the activities. <p>Findings and conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion with the staff and scrutiny of the assessment records show that the staff are using effective methods for identifying the children's individual stages of development, abilities and needs. GRADE 1. ➤ Review of the staff's short-term planning shows that the assessment information is not used as well as it could be to design play activities and experiences that extend, or support, individual children's development and learning. GRADE 2. ➤ Observation of the children at play shows that, while most display an interest in the activities, some children quickly exhaust the potential of the play materials and become less settled. GRADE 2.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The staff are using effective methods for identifying the children's individual stages of development, abilities and needs. ➤ Most of the children display an interest in the activities.
Areas for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Planning more clearly to meet the needs of individual children. ➤ Extending the play activities and preparing additional resources that are readily accessible when required. ➤ Developing the staff's skills in building on the children's ideas and interests, and suggesting new directions for the play, in order to increase the levels of motivation, engagement and concentration shown by all the children.

Grade



ACTION PLANS
Guidance for
Pre-school Centres

APPENDIX 4

ACTION PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

1. The inspection of your pre-school centre, carried out by the Department of Education's (DE) inspectors, has identified areas of the educational provision which require improvement. At the time of the report-back, the Reporting Inspector advised the staff that they should draw up an action plan and send this plan to the DE within a given time.
2. This leaflet aims to provide some guidance for staff in drawing up an action plan. The plan needs to be useful to the staff in developing the work of the centre and to show clearly to others how the necessary improvements will be brought about.
3. The implementation of an action plan should lead to an improvement in the quality of the children's educational experiences.
4. The inspection report will help identify the strengths of your centre and those areas where there are shortcomings. The action plan should help you focus on how to improve the provision and on how to develop your strengths.

WHAT SHOULD THE ACTION PLAN CONTAIN?

5. The action plan shows what you will do to build on the inspection report and improve the provision you are making.
6. For each key area requiring action, your action plan should explain:
 - what you intend to do as a staff;
 - how you intend to do it;
 - who will carry out the necessary tasks;
 - when the work will be done; and
 - how you will monitor progress and measure your success.
7. The action plan should cover a period of no more than 12 months; often the plans will be completed in a shorter period. Some areas for action will take longer than 12 months to address fully; if this is the case you should plan what you can achieve within a year and then, if necessary, draw up a further action plan to take the development into a second year.

8. For each key area for action identified in the inspection report, information about the following should be included in the action plan:
- **Targets:** your main aims for the area showing the improvements you are trying to bring about. Targets need to be specific, manageable and achievable.
 - **Action:** a note of the specific tasks to be undertaken in order to achieve the targets.
 - **Responsibilities:** the responsibilities given to named members of staff for carrying out the tasks you have identified.
 - **Resources:** the materials, equipment, training, or time needed to complete the action plan.
 - **Time Scale:** the dates when you intend to begin the tasks and when you intend the action to be completed.
 - **Monitoring:** details of who will check that the tasks have been carried out and of the methods which they will use.
 - **Evidence of Success:** details of how the staff will know that the changes made are successful in achieving the target.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF A GOOD ACTION PLAN?

9. An action plan should be a useful working document; it does not need to be long or complicated. You should set out the document in a manner which is easily read and presents the information in a systematic fashion.
10. A good action plan:
- **is brief and clear:** it gives notes of the essential information under each heading using language which is easily understood.
 - contains specific details: it describes exactly how you intend to achieve your targets.
 - **is realistic and manageable:** it sets targets, identifies tasks and sets time scales which will be within your capacity to achieve.
 - **involves all the staff:** it involves all the staff in drawing up the plan and in carrying it out. It helps to make the staff aware they all have a part to play and contributes to a sense of team spirit.
 - **identifies methods for checking success:** it includes a means of recognising that the action you are taking is being successful in improving the work of the centre and is leading to a higher quality in the children's learning experiences.
 - **has the support of the management committee or proprietor.**

USING YOUR ACTION PLAN

11. Once the plan is drawn up and agreed, it is important that you use it as a working document and do not set it aside or keep it in a file to be looked at now and again. It should be displayed prominently and referred to frequently, especially when you are planning the programme and observing the children's play and progress.
12. The plan may be used to record work completed by marking off tasks; it should be changed, developed, and modified as needed.
13. You should discuss and review your action plan regularly at staff meetings.

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OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



EXAMPLES OF FORMATS FOR RECORDING AN ACTION PLAN

These examples are suggestions only; they are included to provide helpful illustration. There are many appropriate ways to record action plans.

ACTION PLAN 1

KEY ISSUE: The need to provide a wider range of energetic physical play opportunities.

Target To develop the children's confidence and physical skills by providing a wider range of indoor and outdoor physical play activities.

Action

1. Staff meeting to look at possibilities for a wider range of safe physical play indoors and outdoors and identify the extra resources needed.
2. Re-arrange playroom to give bigger space for physical play. Change timetable to give more time for physical play in each session. Change staff duty rota to include getting outdoor equipment ready for use every day.
3. Sort out equipment in store; draw up plan for change of physical activities twice a week.
4. Talk to committee about funding for new resources.
5. Two staff to visit other playgroups and nursery schools to get ideas and ask for advice on equipment. Draw up list of ideas for developing physical play.
6. Purchase new equipment.
7. Work on the planning for physical play to widen the range of activity and identify the skills which children should develop.
8. Explore the cost of new fencing for the outdoor area.

Responsibilities

1. Helen to lead staff meetings, talk to Committee and draw up staff rota.
2. Tracey and Nuala to make suggestions about changing timetable and arrangement of playroom, and sort out store. All staff to agree changes.
3. Helen and Tracey to visit other playgroups, draw up list of ideas and make list of equipment needed.
4. Helen to lead meetings to work on planning; Helen and Tracey to write up notes and plans.
5. Tracey to find out about new fencing.

Resources

1. Extra time for staff meetings, for re-arranging playroom, for drawing up plans and for sorting out store.
2. Time for staff to make visits.
3. Funds for purchase of new equipment and for fencing outdoor area

Time Scale 6 months - work to be completed by Feb.

Monitoring

1. Helen to monitor progress and report to Management Committee.
2. All staff to evaluate sessions at staff meetings.
3. All staff to record children's use of the equipment and observe development of physical skills.

Evidence of Success

1. Increased use of the outdoor area all year.
2. Staff noting children using equipment well and spending longer time in physical play.
3. Observations of improvement in children's confidence and physical skills.
4. All physical play equipment being used regularly throughout the year.

Action Plan 2

KEY ISSUE: Staff need to agree and implement more effective strategies for promoting settled play and acceptable behaviour.

Targets	Action	Responsibility	Monitoring	Evidence of Success
Make the settling-in procedures more effective.	Review organisation to give more time for settling children who have difficulty.	Jane and Ann to reorganise.	Observations of settling-in period.	Fewer children with unsettled behaviour.
Staff to share similar expectations for children's behaviour and agree suitable action to encourage good behaviour.	Whole staff meeting to define acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Draw up list of ways to encourage good behaviour and handle inappropriate behaviour. Change behaviour management policy to include detail of decisions made.	Jane to write up changes in policy and bring to Committee for approval. All staff to implement actions agreed.	Daily log of incidents and action taken. Staff to evaluate behaviour at end of each session.	Decrease in number of incidents. Fewer children having difficulty in playing amicably.
Improve the organisation of the sessions to encourage settled play and concentration.	Change organisation of snack routine and end of sessions. Introduce story reading for small groups; make large group story time optional for children.	Jane and Ann to reorganise routines. All staff to implement changes.	Staff to evaluate at end of sessions.	Children show more interest in stories. No queues for washing hands; no waiting for parents.
	Increase length of free play period. Draw up rota for changing materials.	Jane to make timetable changes and rota.	Staff to evaluate at end of sessions.	Children show better concentration.

Targets	Action	Responsibility	Monitoring	Evidence of Success
	Introduce key-worker system with help from Early Years Specialist.	Ann to arrange training session. All staff to implement system.	Staff evaluation.	Staff have better understanding of individual children.
	Change observation notes to extend monitoring of personal, social and emotional development.	Ann to design new sheets.	Observation notes.	Notes show more settled play and better social skills.
Tell parents about new procedures and how they can support staff in encouraging good behaviour.	Hold meeting to explain changes and policy and how parents can help support staff.	Jane to work with Committee, organise meetings.	Parents attending meeting.	Good turn-out for parents' meeting. Good response to changes.
	Use survey to find out parents' views.	Jane to draw up questions and organise.	Answers to survey.	Most parents happy with new policy and willing to support staff.

Resources:

1. Time for additional staff meetings and meetings with parents.
2. More books and floor cushions for story sessions.
3. Time for staff training on key worker system with advice from Early Years Specialist.
4. Photocopying information booklets for parents and parents' survey forms.

Time Scale: Start date: 1 September.

Agree and implement changes to organisation of sessions and behaviour management policy by end of September.

Introduce key worker system and modified records by 1 November.

Hold parents' meetings in November.

Run survey by end November.

Complete all action tasks by 1 December; monitor success during period December-June.

Review the evidence of success at end of June.

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Appendix 4: Sample of an action plan.

**ACTION PLAN
PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE**

Focus/Key Issue:

Where are we now?

What are the targets?	What action needs to be taken?	How will we monitor and evaluate?	How will we know if we are being successful?	Who will be involved?	How long will it take?	What resources do we need?

Appendix 5

USEFUL MATERIALS AND PUBLICATIONS

1. *Evaluating Pre-School Education*: Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (2000)
2. *Begin With Quality, The Pre-school Expansion Programme*: Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (2002)
3. *Improvement through Self-evaluation, DVD for Pre-school Education*: The Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (2003)
4. *Action Plans, Guidance for Pre-school centres*: Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education (1999)
5. *The Child at the Centre, Self-evaluation in the Early Years*: Scottish Executive (2000)
6. *School Improvement, The Northern Ireland Programme*: Department of Education Northern Ireland (1998)
7. *Pastoral Care in Schools, Child Protection*: Department of Education Northern Ireland (1999)
8. *Standards for Pre-School Settings*: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2002)
9. *Evaluating and Improving Quality in Early Childhood Settings: Effective Early Learning Programme*: Professor Christine Pascal, Dr Tony Bertrum (2001)
10. *A Process-Orientated Monitoring System for Young Children*: Dr Ferre Laevers, Centre for Experiential Education, Leuven, Belgium.
11. *A Good Practice Guide to Effective Management for Early Childhood Community Based Services*: NIPPA – the Early Years Organisation (2003)
12. *Co-operating to Safeguard Children*: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2003)