

# Committing to quality

When it comes to the education and care we offer children in the foundation years, only the best is good enough, says **Sue Robb**...

**I**t should be the entitlement of all children to access quality provision in the foundation years, but Ofsted reports, self-evaluations from settings across the country, local authority evaluations, and organisational reviews tell us that this is not always the case.

The wealth of existing evidence, published in the Evidence Pack accompanying *Families in the Foundation Years* ([tinyurl.com/clf2hqt](http://tinyurl.com/clf2hqt)) is clear that high-quality effective early years provision has a significant impact on children's social, emotional and cognitive development and is a key factor in improving outcomes for children and families. It narrows the gap between the highest and lowest performers, and gives all children the positive start to

play and learning that they need.

The government's recent pledge to increase access to provision of free early years education to 40 per cent of the most disadvantaged two-year-olds will stretch the sector like never before, but we cannot allow any outside pressures to affect the service we are delivering. One thing will never change – every child should be given access to the highest quality provision.

## Improving quality

So how do we ensure quality provision is a given? The Foundation Years website, ([foundationyears.org.uk](http://foundationyears.org.uk)), has a section on quality provision, which highlights key areas that practitioners need to reflect upon. Quality improvement is a continuous



## find out more

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cycle of self-reflection, identifying areas for improvement, implementing improvement plans and reviewing their impact.

There are many areas that need reflecting upon. For example, the importance of child development – practitioners should constantly be asking themselves “How up to date is my knowledge on this subject?”, “Have I found enough time to delve into the latest research – for example, the latest thinking on brain development?” and “How can I best utilise my continuing professional development to upskill on these subjects?”

Honed knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, and how it should be implemented in practice, is also vital to quality provision. As practitioners, we need to have a secure working knowledge of the EYFS, and feel confident in using the guidance from both 2008 and the recently published 2012 version.

Self-evaluation is similarly key to the process

## Quality communication

In recent years there has been a real focus on early communication and language with the ‘Every Child a Talker’ programme and the present ‘Early Language Programme’ (ELP) led by I CAN. So, in considering the importance of early language the following questions will be critical:

- How familiar are you with the materials from these programmes?
- How do you use them to support your children’s language development? And;
- How do you think through your interactions with children to ensure that you are extending their language?



of remaining on top of the EYFS developments – we must always ask:

- How familiar am I with the characteristics of effective learning?
- Do I ensure that my interactions with the children stretch their thinking and their capabilities?
- How often do I observe the children’s use of the learning environment – indoors and out, and make changes to reflect their interests?
- How often do I involve my children in designing their play environments and areas?
- Do I have the opportunity to visit sites of best practice and learn from their work?
- Is my planning based on observational assessment?

Only when we are confident that we are delivering the best quality provision, that we are up to date with the latest evidence based requirements, and that we have seen the array of best practice offered at other settings, can we be sure that the children are getting the best possible support.

## Accessible provision

The inclusivity of the provision should be a key feature of driving up quality. As early years professionals, we can see the impact that reduced stimulation or exclusion from activities, even when accidental, can have on children, and consequently we know that services must be as accessible as possible.

To help deliver that accessibility, it is important to assess the provision on offer to children on a daily basis, and gauge how it responds to the needs of children for whom English is not their home language, or for those with special needs, as an example. As a practitioner, you may have access to some excellent support in this regard via your continuing professional development programmes – and local authorities are often keen to ensure services are as open as possible to disadvantaged children, so make sure you take advantage of all the support on offer.

Partnership working with an emphasis on

health and parental involvement is another key factor in quality provision. The *Families in the Foundation Years* policy document and the messages coming out of the revised EYFS framework give justifiable prominence to working partnerships with parents, and with colleagues supporting other children in the foundation years. We must always ask:

- How does engagement with parents really work in my setting?
- Do our parents know how they can best support their child’s learning and development?
- Do they know their child’s next learning step and what they can do to help them to it?
- How do I work with health colleagues, and how can I work with them more? Is my relationship with my health colleagues as honest and sharing as it should be?

Of course, effective leadership is a driver of quality and is crucial to quality improvement. As a leader it will be important to organise your week to allow staff to discuss children’s needs and to deploy staff in order to make the most of their strengths. Monitoring and identifying areas for improvement to ensure these are having an impact on children’s learning and development is also part of ensuring that your setting is delivering high-quality support. Strong leadership is central to the delivery of every good setting, and you must be sure that you are working with your staff in the most constructive way. It will also require particular dedication from you to ensure that your workforce is committed to continuous learning and improvement.

Finally, we must ensure that the children within our care are safe. The reforms set out in the Munro review are key building blocks to ensuring children have the support they need to prosper, free from danger, but they must overlap with the clear dedication to child safety in every setting if children are to be given the support they need to learn and grow as positively as they can.