

Ready for

Ann Roberts offers advice for early years teams preparing to welcome Ofsted into their settings...

Inspecti



Ofsted inspections are only a snapshot of what is happening in an early years setting on a given day; however, their outcome indicates the quality of the setting which is regulated against National Standards and legal requirements (The Welfare Requirements), so this judgement is important; what's more, it stays with the setting till the next inspection, which could be several years later.

An approaching inspection can be a daunting and, for some, very stressful time. This may be due to a fear of the unknown or a lack of experience, or for some staff the fact that they are naturally nervous about being observed by external visitors; they may even feel under pressure from their manager, or pick up on their manager's own anxieties.

Be prepared

Using a planned developmental programme of pre-inspection support will assist in building teamwork and the confidence of staff in readiness for the inspection day. This support should be driven by the manager/leader of the setting, but if there is Local Authority support available, it may be helpful to use this resource to bring an external pair of eyes to the setting – very like the inspector will be, but in the form of a critical friend.

This will assist you by allowing you to target specific training needs and get staff booked on the appropriate courses, and by helping you to prioritise resources. It can be also a very good team building exercise, which can pay off on the inspection day itself by helping staff to work together in a more cohesive manner.

1. First steps

Find the paperwork from your last inspection and read it again. Look at any actions or recommendations – have you dealt with these? You will need evidence of this to hand on the day of inspection.

It's important, too, for managers to ensure that all CRB documents are up-to-date, that all staff have attended, and updated where necessary, any safeguarding training to comply with local requirements, and essential staff training certificates such as first aid do

not need renewal.

Next, spend some time revisiting the key documents on which the inspection is based. Look again at the welfare requirements in a staff meeting as a matter of urgency – these are statutory and are linked to legal requirements, meaning they must be complied with on every single day the setting is open. Check dates on policies and ensure there is a planned review date on documents – time flies and you can forget such things!

2. Being reflective

The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum gives a strong message to practitioners that they must be reflective and be able to evaluate themselves and their practice, and that they should use this to develop a high-quality service for children. So, ensure that you have a completed self-evaluation document – if possible using the whole team. You can use the Ofsted format which is available from its website (ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance).

This takes time, so tackling it in sections is the best option. The manager and staff need to have planned focus time, so adequate planning and preparation in the lead-up to an inspection is important.



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3. A plan of action

An action plan is a document that should be present in all settings. It is produced in response to inspection but also to reflection, and it needs to have clear measurable outcomes on it by set dates, with evidence listed to show what has been achieved.

Once written, the plan should be used and referred to, not just placed in a file and forgotten about. Whoever is monitoring it should be adding notes and dates to it, and it is a practical aide-memoire for the setting to keep on track with. It has to be shared, known and signed up to by all staff, not just managers, leaders or owners.

4. Talk it through

Be honest about your areas of development and integrate them into the self-evaluation and action plan – so that everything is clear and has direction. Also, celebrate your successes and have evidence to back these up.

It's very important to talk to staff and find out their concerns – be positive and instil confidence whilst working to address any areas that require development. Have a philosophy of 'don't bring me problems, bring me solutions'. This will not happen overnight and staff will need some ideas and examples of how you do this. The team is only as strong as its weakest link, and so communication is a key way of assessing this.

Onwards and upwards...

If the preparation by the setting is sound and the staff feel they can do no more, then the inspection day should simply be a showcase, an opportunity to demonstrate the high quality of service that you deliver. However, even in settings that gain an 'outstanding' assessment from Ofsted, there is the question of sustaining this high quality to consider. Preparation activities for Ofsted inspection, such as those outlined above, often help staff to develop relationships and gain an understanding of what they bring to the setting and what they need to develop, in order to keep standards high.

In the next issue, we'll look at the ways in which settings can respond effectively to the findings of an Ofsted inspection.



5. First impressions

A tidy, clean and well-cared-for environment gives the right impressions to visitors. You'll need to involve all staff in de-cluttering their areas, the public areas and the staff areas, whilst also removing anything that's dated, damaged or not appropriate. In truth, every setting needs to do this regularly whether Ofsted is due or not. It helps get staff feeling more organised, confident and prepared, and makes it clear that when change is necessary things must be addressed and not left to drift.

It pays to prepare...

The process of preparation for inspection is an opportunity for settings to reflect on their practice.

Consider the following:

- What is 'high-quality' – and how do we deliver this in our setting?
- The recipients of this high-quality care and education are the children – what's it like to be a child at this setting?
- How do we measure the impact of this quality – this is what Ofsted will be doing, how do we measure impact for ourselves?
- What do we rate ourselves at – self-evaluation time.
- Is this high-quality care and education watertight and consistent – do all staff understand and can they demonstrate it every day?

find out more

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