

Small steps Big visions

Ann Roberts explains how settings should respond to Ofsted reports both good and bad...

Receiving initial feedback after an Ofsted inspection is the moment you'll find out how you have done after a very busy and intense day. It's helpful if more than one person attends as you listen to the feedback – two people listening take in more than one, and you are more likely to get a balanced view of the inspector's thoughts. The important thing is to hear the positives and hold on to them – people tend to focus on the negatives!

The feedback is confidential; however, staff will be anxious to know how the day went, so it is important that not only do they get a thank you from the manager before they go home, but that they also understand that they will get to know the official outcome soon. Staff who feel appreciated will be more ready

to work as a team on the post Ofsted actions/recommendations/action plan.

1. First things first

If there are any welfare requirements that have not been complied with then the inspector will expect this to be rectified within a short period of time. As such, these issues will require immediate action, and staff must be made aware of the urgency and the need to ensure that all requirements are met in future.

It is important that the management find out why the legal requirements in question had not been complied with. It could be one or more of the following:

- Staff not having a full knowledge of the welfare requirements – this would require a training session and/or a staff meeting where staff sign afterwards to say that they do now know what is required.
- Room leaders or team leaders not monitoring staff and allowing standards to fall.
- Management not evaluating the overall quality of the provision and not conducting spot checks/observation checks at regular intervals themselves; management need to lead on quality.

2. Taking action

After an inspection there needs to be following up from the setting. The written report has to be processed before it is released by Ofsted, and the time this takes can be a productive period in which you should ensure the momentum from the inspection is sustained. Those who received Ofsted's verbal feedback need to reflect on it and revisit the setting's action plan and self-evaluation forms to see how things match up and what can be done to start working on the any issues raised.

During the inspection staff are engaged and driven by adrenaline – but afterwards some may feel exhausted by the process. It is important not to let them lose pace and direction. If the inspection highlighted an area

requiring development this can be used as a positive incentive to make improvements.

Staff should be asked the following:

- How can we develop?
- Who can we get to help us?
- Can we visit somewhere where there is good practice on this?
- What impact will this make on the staff and the children if we do improve – what benefits will we have?

After this discussion what is decided will need to be added to an existing action plan – or a new action plan if it's felt a fresh start is necessary. It should state what needs to be addressed, how, by whom and by what date – and, most importantly of all, should include a named person whose responsibility it will be to make sure it happens, as well as to collect the evidence it has happened and the impact information and relevant data.





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find out more

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3. Post formal report

Once the formal report is completed and released it will appear on the Ofsted website. This means that it is accessible to all other providers in the area, the general public and the Local Authority – the whole world, in fact.

The setting needs to ensure that the current

parents have access to the report, so displaying a clearly-labelled copy at the entrance to the setting, and providing verbal signposting to it, is a sensible idea. You may also wish to write to parents to inform them that the report is available to them.

More important, though, is that staff see the report first, read and understand it, so that if parents ask them questions they are equipped to respond. They also need to be able to articulate what the setting will be doing in response to the report, so giving them a copy of the new/updated action plan and ensuring they understand it is advisable. This could be carried out at a post-inspection meeting attended by the whole staff team.

4. Business as usual...

As long as you have received a 'satisfactory' or above rating from Ofsted your setting will continue as a registered provider. Obviously, achieving 'good' or 'outstanding' ratings is what settings strive to achieve: not only does this provide recognition of the quality of the provision, but some authorities stipulate that settings should achieve a certain standard as part of conditions attached to accessing funding (this will vary according to the authority you are in). Earning Ofsted's praise can, of course, also help attract parents seeking the best value for money and highest quality of childcare and education for their children to your setting, meaning it is financially beneficial.

Sustaining quality

Even if a setting has received a very good Ofsted rating the good work must still be sustained. Staff changes can have a massive impact on the quality of education and childcare, as can leadership and management changes. The inspection day is only a snapshot – the day-to-day work of ensuring quality is unrelenting – and so settings should always be thinking 'what next?'

It must be remembered, too, that the early years sector faces change on a regular basis. Keeping abreast of these changes is important, so reading publications, attending training and searching the Internet for new information is intelligence work that needs to be ongoing in any setting.

Finally, remember, a successful setting is one that:

- achieves high-quality childcare and education for all
- faces challenges and changes and uses them to strengthen teamwork, and assess and develop its provision
- measures impact, and holds appropriate, relevant data and uses it
- staff enjoy working in and thus strive to improve
- children are happy to attend and learn in.

