

Children's centre self-evaluation form guidance

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Introduction

This document provides information for children's centres on completing the self-evaluation form (SEF). It includes guidance notes for responding to each of the questions.

Purpose of the form

Ofsted recognises the importance of monitoring and self-evaluation as a crucial part of every children's centre's ongoing cycle of review and planning. Inspectors recognise that centres should have their own method of undertaking this and documents to record the process.

The SEF is only intended to offer a document to record the summary of a centre's self-evaluation process if no other such form exists. The SEF may also be used to capture an update of a centre's self-evaluation if inspection occurs part way through the self-evaluation cycle.

Inspectors will make use of your centre's self-evaluation, in whatever form it is recorded, when discussing their arrangements for inspection. The impact of your self-evaluation in helping to bring about improvement in a single centre or children's centre group will be a major factor in their judgements about the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management and their capacity to sustain improvement.

The SEF should indicate key strengths and weaknesses, and what needs to be done to bring about improvement. It should record the impact of the centre's actions on the lives of young children and their families. Judgements and conclusions about the quality of the children's centre's/ children's centre group's work, should be supported by evidence.

When to complete the form

There is no fixed time in the year when we recommend that the SEF should be completed. It is best done to fit in with your normal cycle of review and planning and to inform your annual conversation with the local authority. It is likely that the most efficient and effective manner of managing the process will involve the centre/s focusing on, and updating, different sections of the SEF throughout the year.

Structure of the form

Your SEF is organised into two sections:

- Section A: self-evaluation
- Section B: factual information about your children's centre/s.

Completing the questions in Section A: self-evaluation

Section A, the evaluative section, is structured to correspond to the *Children's centre inspection handbook* used by inspectors.¹ Part 2 of this handbook, the evaluation schedule, sets out what inspectors evaluate, sources of evidence, outline guidance and grade descriptors for every inspection judgement. The grade descriptors and the information about what inspectors evaluate are replicated within this guidance document.

We recommend that you have a copy of this guidance and the *Children's centre inspection handbook* to hand when completing Section A of your SEF.

Each question starts by asking centres to grade aspects of their work on a four-point scale, as follows:

- Grade 1: Outstanding
- Grade 2: Good
- Grade 3: Requires improvement
- Grade 4: Inadequate.

Please refer closely to the grade descriptors and guidance for inspectors when deciding on a grade. Briefly list the key reasons for deciding on this grade and ensure that you reference your judgement to the relevant grade descriptor. You should include only the minimum amount of detail in support of your judgement; bullet points are quite acceptable. If you judge that the children's centre is close to a grade boundary, briefly say why you did not select the other grade.

It may be helpful to consider the outline guidance for inspectors in the children's centre inspection handbook before using the grade descriptors to decide on a judgement. The SEF is intended to be a summary of your children centre's or group of centres' self-evaluation. Wherever possible, you should support your judgements with carefully chosen evidence that demonstrates the impact of the centre's/group's actions on the lives and well-being of young children and families.

Access to services by young children and families

In this section you should take a critical look at access to services by young children and families, including those expecting children and those in target groups. You should evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for encouraging families to participate in relevant services, including those who may be less likely to do so. You should show how you use your analysis of data and your own evaluations to support your judgements. Please refer closely to the children's centre inspection handbook and grade descriptors (pages 26–28) when deciding on a grade.

¹ *Children's centre inspection handbook* (130056), Ofsted 2013;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/childrens-centre-inspection-handbook-for-inspections-april-2013.

The guidance below provides examples to illustrate how you might use data and evaluations to support your judgements. These are written in italics. These are not exhaustive and do not provide examples for all indicators in the *Children's centre inspection handbook*. Inspectors take account of the full range of indicators for each judgement.

- The children's centre works with partners to identify the families with young children in its area. *For example, how information and data are shared between partners to identify target groups.*
- The children's centre establishes and maintains contact with targeted families in its area. *For example, the participation rates and attendance levels of each of the target groups in the children's centre/s reach area with whom the children's centre/s establishes contact for example:*
 - *teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers*
 - *lone parents*
 - *children in workless households*
 - *children in Black and minority ethnic groups*
 - *disabled children and children of disabled parents.*
- The children's centre has identified the target groups and individual families most in need of intervention and support, the specific nature of their needs, and the universal and specialist services needed to support them. *For example, how consultation, referrals, outreach work, universal services, observations, assessments and discussions are used effectively to identify needs and match families to the services they need, including specialist services.*
- The children's centre prioritises families that need support appropriately. *For example, representation on key strategic local groups such as multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC); how the centre/group identifies which children are most in need of early intervention and works with other agencies to enable families to access the help they need.*
- The children's centre uses outreach work to identify target groups and encourage those families who would otherwise be unlikely to access the services the centre has to offer. *For example, the deployment of family support workers has increased the numbers of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attending activities.*
- The children's centre provides or facilitates arrangements for targeted children to take up the free entitlement to early education, especially disadvantaged families with two-year-olds. *For example, the proportion of children of families from targeted groups that take up the free entitlement to early education through the centre's own provision or through the centre helping families to find high-quality provision elsewhere.*

- The children's centre provides or facilitates access to universal activities and relevant services for targeted families, and monitors how many families use them and continue to use them until their needs have been effectively met. *For example, the proportion of families from target groups within the area that the centre serves, are registered with the centre and have access to information, advice and guidance about early childhood services through the centre, its partners or its outreach work.*

The quality and impact of practice and services

In this section you should take a critical look at the quality, range and relevance of the universal and targeted services provided for families. You are asked to evaluate the impact of practice and services in improving children's school readiness and health and well-being, and improving parenting skills and the lives of target families. You should show how you use your analysis of data and your own evaluations to support your judgements. Please refer closely to the children's centre inspection handbook and grade descriptors (pages 28–32) when deciding on a grade.

This SEF guidance below provides examples to illustrate how you might use data and evaluations to support your judgements. These are written in italics. These are not exhaustive and do not provide examples for all indicators in the *Children's centre inspection handbook*. You should consider including evaluations for all indicators in your SEF. Inspectors will take account of the full range of indicators for each judgement as set out in the *Children's centre inspection handbook*.

- The effectiveness of partnerships with early years providers, schools, health services, adult training services and employment services in providing the activities and services required to achieve the agreed outcomes for targeted families. *For example, the extent to which partners make referrals, share information and assessments and monitor progress to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes.*
- Whether the services directly provided are appropriate and relevant for the needs of targeted families in the area, taking account of how they are decided on, planned, the intended outcomes and how these will be measured.
- The quality and impact of services in improving outcomes, or sustaining already very good outcomes, in the following areas:
 - the readiness of target children for school, *for example, Early Years Foundation Stage children whose parents and carers attend the centre are making improvements in their communication and language (CL)*
 - improved parenting, *for example, the completion rates of parenting programmes, the number going on to other activities and the number of positive evaluations from adults who have accessed the centre's parenting courses*
 - opportunities for target adults to participate in activities that improve their personal skills, education and employability, *for example, increasing*

take-up of adult learning courses, users with qualifications and adults attending employment advice sessions

- the development of healthy lifestyles for target children and their families, *for example, the extent to which the group of centres have met health-specific targets as a result of services provided by partner agencies*
 - parents' understanding of their responsibilities for their children's safety and well-being.
- The effectiveness of any intervention and prevention work in protecting target children and securing their well-being. *For example, the quality of the group's record keeping of case files and the evidence that they reflect the targeted families' views and wishes and the involvement of other professionals.*
 - Any follow-up work and/or tracking² of children and their targeted families after they have completed courses or activities to identify sustained impact. *For example, the proportion of adults who access courses and complete them and improve their literacy, numeracy and/or language skills and/or the qualifications or skills needed to improve their chances of employment.*
 - How well practitioners work with target children and parents, are good role models and have sufficiently high expectations and aspirations for targeted families.
 - The effectiveness of the care, guidance and support that the centre and its partners provide. *For example, the centre receives positive evaluations of the support provided to families in times of crisis.*
 - How the centre facilitates opportunities to volunteer, to contribute to the running of the centre and to develop formal and informal networks of support. *For example, the steps taken to train volunteers and the centre's work to encourage families to actively contribute to the centre and community.*

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

This section is about the effectiveness and impact of the centre's leadership, governance and management.

You should consider the vision for your centre(s) and how you communicate this to staff, parents and children. How well you deliver your vision and ambition and prioritise improvements contributes towards the grade for how effectively the setting is led and managed. Please refer closely to the children's centre inspection handbook and grade descriptors (pages 32–36) when deciding on a grade.

² Tracking is used here to mean monitoring of the effectiveness and impact of the centres work.

The guidance below provides examples to illustrate how you might support your judgements. These are written in italics. These are not exhaustive and do not provide examples for all indicators in the *Children's centre inspection handbook*. You should include an evaluation of all indicators in your SEF. Inspectors will take account of the full range of indicators for each judgement.

- How the local authority, any private, voluntary or independent provider the local authority has commissioned to run the centre on its behalf, governors and centre leaders use evidence and robust data to set and agree on performance and outcome measures that can reduce inequalities and improve the lives of families in their area. *For example, the evidence of the contribution of partners in evaluating the centre's services, compiling the centre's development plan and in deciding on priority issues.*
- The challenge provided by local authorities and how this contributes to improved performance. *For example, targets set from the annual conversation are challenging and are aimed at the key priorities for the local area.*
- The effectiveness of strategic partnerships, including any service level agreements or joint and collaborative working, intended to ensure that the centre is able to deliver, commission or make other appropriate arrangements for children and families. *For example, the centre's commissioning from the private, voluntary and independent sector in providing financial advice and guidance and in helping to develop families' financial stability and employment prospects.*
- The rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation systems used to inform the centre's priorities and set challenging targets for improvement, including how any information from complaints is used to drive up service improvement. *For example, the centre's development plan is based on thorough evaluation, contains quantifiable success criteria and describes actions to address key priorities aimed at improving the lives of families and target groups.*
- The extent to which staff delivering the centre's services are appropriately qualified, drawn from a range of professional backgrounds and the effectiveness of systems for supervision, performance management and the continuous professional development of staff. *For example, the centre's records of staff training and professional development show an increase in staff members' knowledge and level of qualifications in areas that are relevant to the needs of families.*
- The effectiveness of the policies, procedures and practices in place, including those for staff recruitment and vetting and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young children. *For example, the centre is able to produce a number of case studies where families have made positive progress and improved children's safety and well-being.*
- The effectiveness of monitoring of target groups to ensure the removal of any perceived inequalities and/or barriers to engagement. *For example, the*

centre can provide evidence of the steps taken over time that have increased participation rates of targeted groups of users.

- The extent to which families contribute to the centre's performance and delivery, for example through advisory boards. *For example, actions taken by the centre or group in the light of feedback from parents provided informally or formally to the advisory board.*
- How the centre knows that children and families are satisfied with the centre and its services and how well their views are taken into account to improve access and to shape services. *For example, regular parental surveys state a high level of satisfaction with the quality and the ability of services across the group of centres in the area to meet their needs and improve outcomes for them.*
- The extent to which resources are used effectively and efficiently to meet agreed local priorities and the needs of targeted children and families living in the area, including the level of innovation in attracting new resources and/or services. *For example, the centre can provide evidence of the innovative steps taken to obtain more effective use of resources as seen in the increased number of activities provided for targeted groups of users.*

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness judgement takes into account the three key judgements and whether the centre or centre group is meeting its legal requirements as set out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009).

Where the inspection is of a children's centre group, the overall effectiveness judgement must consider any differences in access to or the quality of provision and services across the different centres in the group and the impact of these on the overall needs of families across the group's reach area/locality.

Where there are shared services across a number of centres working collaboratively, the overall effectiveness judgement must take into account how each individual centre identifies the families that need the shared services and how it helps families to access those services.

When completing this section refer to pages 36–37 of the children's centre inspection handbook.

Completing the questions in Section B: factual information about your children's centre/s

Section B is a record of statistical and other factual information about your children's centre. It enables you to identify the context in which your children's centre or children's centre group works, and to explain any distinctive aims and ethos. It provides the factual background for your judgements about how well the centre or group is doing.

Areas you may wish to refer to are:

- the main characteristics of the users and the communities served by the centre or group, including their social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, indicating the level of prosperity or deprivation
- your distinctive aims and any special features of your children's centre or children's centre group, for example if there is a significant partnership with particular providers or agencies (such as shared arrangements for the provision of services and activities or partnerships with employers)
- whether there are particular characteristics, including any significant awards you have received
- any specific contextual or other issues that act as aids or barriers to raising performance, for example,
 - any difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff or members of the advisory board/s
 - recent or impending reorganisation
 - particularly important facts in your recent history, such as a change of leadership structure
- any recent and significant changes in the composition of the reach area/locality in terms of the social, cultural or other backgrounds of users.

Information about the area/locality and the children's centre group or individual centres to be inspected

Include information on the name and number of centres in the group/cluster/locality; list (separately where appropriate) the numbers of children under five years living in each of the centre's reach areas and/or the group/locality as appropriate.

State the level of the offer made by the centre/ each of the centres in the group.

Leadership, governance and management arrangements

We know that leadership, governance and management arrangements vary and it is important that we understand the model that applies to this centre/children's centre group.

Please outline your arrangements. For example, state whether for inspection purposes you are a single centre or a children's centre group, and whether governance arrangements such as advisory boards are separate or shared.

If you consider that another model or other governance arrangements apply, then please include these details.

Please outline the leadership and management arrangements; for example, a group/cluster/locality manager or leader, and whether the centre/s are managed on behalf of the local authority or by a third party organisation.

Context

Please include a description of the locality served by the centre/centre group.

Please include information of any local needs and or priorities issues within the local area, for example, the proportion of families living in poverty in the local area, incidents of domestic violence, rate of emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries to young people.

The needs of children and their families

Describe any significant target groups identified by the centre as in most need of support such as workless households; teenage mothers.

Any other relevant information

Please provide information about any particular features of the centre/centre group and the locality. Note any significant changes in the make-up of the local community, such as changes to cluster arrangements/mergers, etc.