

Report summary

The impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage

A good start

Summary

This survey evaluates the impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage on the quality of provision and developmental outcomes for young children from birth to five years. It examined the work of providers across the sector from large primary schools to childminders working alone with one or two children. The survey focused particularly on two areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. In July 2010 Children's Minister Sarah Teather asked Dame Clare Tickell to carry out a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and this report is intended to inform that review.

At an early stage in the survey, inspectors held discussions with local authority officers from 12 local authorities to gain their perspective on the impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage in their area. Between September and December 2010 the survey team visited 68 early years providers, including 20 childminders, 23 childcare providers on non-domestic premises and 25 schools, in nine of these 12 local authorities. The views of 140 parents of young children were gained through Ofsted's Parents' Panel. The survey also drew on data from almost 54,000 routine inspections of early years provision since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in September 2008, and took account of national data on children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Maintained schools have sustained a high quality of early years provision. Because of their starting points and previous experience in delivering the Foundation Stage curriculum, schools usually deliver the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage well. This was particularly evident in some of the areas of focus in this survey, including developing children's communication, language and literacy skills, and in the activities of assessing children's progress and self-evaluation by providers.

Nevertheless, Ofsted's evidence from inspections carried out since September 2008 and this survey shows that all types of providers can, and do, deliver the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage well. The proportion of registered providers in the early years and childcare sector judged to be good or outstanding has increased since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage. At the end of August 2008, 59% of childcare providers were judged to be good or outstanding. At the end of August 2010, this figure had risen to 68%.

There are differences in quality between the different types of childcare provider. Overall 71% of childcare providers on non-domestic premises, inspected from the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage up to September 2010, were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with 67% of childminders. This gap in quality is relatively small in more affluent areas, but grows larger as the level of deprivation increases.

Ofsted's inspection data show that 16% of providers who left the sector following an inspection under the Early Years Foundation Stage framework had been judged inadequate. In comparison, just 2% of providers who had an Early Years Foundation Stage judgement and remained active were inadequate. This suggests that a combination of the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage and inspection against its requirements have contributed to an overall improvement in quality.

Overall, Early Years Foundation Stage profile results have improved nationally since 2008. The proportion of children working securely in communication, language and literacy has risen by six percentage points to 59% in 2010. In personal, social and emotional development the figure was 77%, a rise of five percentage points. The rate of improvement, for some traditionally lower-performing groups, has been greater than that seen nationally. However, there are some groups of children who, despite an improvement in the proportion reaching a good level of development, lag behind the majority. Girls outperform boys. The rates of improvement for Traveller children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have not been as good as for other children.

This survey looked in depth at outcomes in personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy. In the schools visited, the outcomes in these two areas of learning were very similar. However, in the childcare providers visited for the survey, inspectors judged outcomes in personal, social and emotional development to be good or outstanding in around two thirds of the providers, while outcomes in communication, language and literacy were good or outstanding in less than half.

There were two key reasons for this relative difference in outcomes between the schools and the childcare providers visited. First, the childcare providers were often relying on daily routines rather than specifically planning activities to promote children's learning and development. This was more successful for children's

personal, social and emotional development than their communication, language and literacy skills. Second was the schools' greater success with developing early reading and writing skills. Across all types of provider visited, including some of the good or outstanding ones, inspectors found that children's use of language for thinking was not as well developed as their use of language for communication.

Providers' views about the value and impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage varied. Many were positive, and talked about how it had raised the status of early education, made them more ambitious for themselves and for children, and had given them a clearer idea of what they should be doing and how to improve their practice. However, these views were not shared universally. The childminders visited more often expressed negative views about the Early Years Foundation Stage than other types of providers. These were almost exclusively childminders that had remained satisfactory between their last two inspections and thought of themselves more as carers than educators.

Concerns were raised when the Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced that it would be too formal and put too much pressure on young children. However, the children that the inspectors observed during the survey were, almost without exception, enjoying their time, whatever type of Early Years Foundation Stage setting they were in.

Key findings

Provision and outcomes

- Outcomes in personal, social and emotional development were satisfactory or better in all the schools and childcare providers visited.
- The keys to good outcomes in personal, social and emotional development in the childcare providers surveyed were the routines that practitioners established and the high expectations that they had of children's behaviour. In this area of learning, outcomes were very similar for the childminders and childcare providers on non-domestic premises.
- Children's personal, social and emotional development was better where the providers visited were clear about the stages of learning and development and specifically planned activities to cover all aspects of this area of learning.
- Outcomes for communication, language and literacy were good or outstanding in 42 of the 68 providers visited. This was because practitioners were specifically planning opportunities to develop children's speaking and listening, and early reading and writing skills. This could often be traced back to specific training, for example, in developing children's language skills or in delivering phonics.
- In 18 of the 43 childcare providers visited, children's speaking and listening skills were stronger than their early reading and writing skills, while in the others they were similar. This was more because conversation was part of everyday activities, than because providers intended to prioritise this.

- Children's language for thinking was weaker than their language for communication in 13 of the providers surveyed, including some good and outstanding providers. This was usually because practitioners missed opportunities to encourage children to explain and extend their thinking, or simply did not allow time for children to think.
- Assessment of children's learning and development was good or outstanding in 21 of the 25 schools visited, but only in 15 of the 43 childcare providers. It was inadequate in seven childcare providers but no schools.
- Inspectors found that where assessment was underdeveloped it tended to focus more on children's welfare or their interests, rather than their learning.
- Provision for different groups of children was variable in the providers visited. Schools were more likely to be evaluating the performance of different groups and to be familiar with strategies to overcome barriers to learning, particularly for boys. However, inspectors found that the extent to which schools identified and met the specific needs of different groups was mixed.
- The childcare providers visited, particularly childminders, tended to focus on children as individuals rather than consider the specific needs of different groups, other than those with identified additional needs, in which case they knew how to access external support or advice.

Drivers for improvement

- Inspectors identified two important drivers for improvement: the commitment of practitioners to professional development and improvement; and external support and challenge for providers.
- Nine of the 12 childminders that were found to be good or outstanding, when visited for this survey, had achieved early years qualifications above the minimum required. Ten of the 12 were members of local networks of childminders. In all the childcare providers on non-domestic premises that had improved between their previous two full inspections, qualification levels exceeded the minimum requirements.

Barriers to improvement

- Self-evaluation and action planning were judged to be good or outstanding in only just over a third of the childcare providers visited. Self-evaluation was inadequate in four of the 20 childminders and three of the 23 childcare providers on non-domestic premises visited. In contrast it was good or outstanding in 22 of the 25 schools visited.
- Self-evaluation and action planning were too often seen by childcare providers as something that had to be done rather than a means of improving outcomes for children. However, outcomes for children were no better than satisfactory in any of the providers where self-evaluation was inadequate.

- A difficulty for all types of providers visited, including the good or outstanding ones, was involving parents in ongoing assessments of their child's learning.
- Inspectors found little evidence of ongoing communication about children's learning between the different Early Years Foundation Stage providers that a child might use during the course of a day or week.

Main report published 10 February 2011
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100231

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100231.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100231

© Crown copyright 2011