

Early years inspection toolkit

This toolkit sets out the areas that will be evaluated and graded on inspections of registered early years and childcare provision under sections 49, 60 and 77(2)(b) of the Childcare Act 2006.

It can also be used by leaders to support self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

Please read the current version of the toolkit found on the ['Early years inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information'](#) page.

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For use from 1 September 2025

Gathering evidence

This inspection toolkit is based on statutory duties, non-statutory guidance, professional standards, research and inspection evidence. We will update it as required, usually on an annual basis, to reflect any changes.

Inspections focus on the impact of the systems and processes that leaders use to support the continuous improvement and effective running of the setting.

Inspectors collect first-hand evidence of how the setting typically operates, mainly through professional conversations and observing, often alongside leaders, the day-to-day work of the setting. Inspectors are required to view specific documentation. This should be limited to documents relating to the setting's statutory requirements or documents it produces as part of its normal business processes. Inspectors do not need information to be presented in any specific format, as long as it is easily accessible. We do not need leaders to produce documents specifically for an Ofsted inspection of their setting. This would create unnecessary workload.

Inspectors will be proportionate in weighing up the evidence they gather, balancing the extent of any strengths or areas for development in each of the evaluation areas. This will support grading and allow specific features of practice, whether strengths or areas for development, to be reported clearly.

Supporting evidence for the toolkit

We have published the statutory and non-statutory guidance, professional standards and relevant research that we reviewed to inform and develop the education inspection toolkits.

See the list of references: [Renewed education inspection framework: supporting evidence base](#).

Alternatively, scan the QR code below to see the full list of references:



Safeguarding

This evaluation area considers:

- whether the setting establishes an open and positive safeguarding culture that puts children's interests first
- the extent to which leaders take an effective, whole-setting approach to safeguarding

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research, inspection evidence and learning from internal reviews indicate contribute most strongly to safeguarding. This is so that children who need help and protection receive high-quality support.

The factors are:

- protecting children from maltreatment and harm, whether within or outside the home, or online
- being open and transparent, sharing information appropriately with others, actively seeking expert advice when required, making sure all safeguarding decisions are accessible for scrutiny, and accepting challenge so that the right decisions are made
- being vigilant, recognising that safeguarding issues might occur in any setting at any time, and maintaining an attitude of 'it could happen here'
- ensuring that all those who work with babies and children are trained well so that they understand their responsibilities and the systems and processes that the setting operates, and are empowered to speak out and take action when there are concerns
- recognising that children missing early years education might indicate safeguarding concerns
- actively seeking and listening to the views and experiences of children, practitioners and parents and carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading), and dealing promptly with any concerns
- having appropriate safeguarding and child protection arrangements, which ensure that leaders and staff:
 - identify children who may need early help, which forms part of multi-agency working
 - identify children who are at risk of harm or who have been harmed; this can include, but is not limited to, neglect; abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse (including from their peers); grooming; exploitation; and online harm
 - secure the help that children need and, if required, refer concerns in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help
 - manage safer recruitment and allegations about adults who pose a risk to children
 - respond to the additional safeguarding vulnerabilities of some children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are non-verbal
- being receptive to challenge and reflecting on practice so that safeguarding policies, systems and processes are kept under continual review
- encouraging a culture in which concerns can be communicated and all staff are fully aware of the setting's whistleblowing procedures

Considering safeguarding for different ages and provision types

When inspectors evaluate safeguarding, they consider only the early years foundation stage (EYFS) safeguarding and welfare requirements that do not sit within the children's welfare and wellbeing evaluation area.

When evaluating safeguarding in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors will be sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that the childminder is able to continue to meet the needs of the children in their care
- decisions about and checks on the suitability of childminder assistants are made by Ofsted, whereas other types of providers complete these checks themselves

Gathering evidence about safeguarding

Safeguarding culture

In gathering evidence about the safeguarding culture, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- establish a culture in which staff, children, parents and others feel comfortable raising and discussing any concerns that relate to safeguarding children and feel confident that appropriate action will be taken
- ensure that safeguarding procedures and associated policies are clear, accessible, in line with local and national expectations and reflected in the setting's practice
- know and are assured that policies and procedures are understood, are applied and have a positive impact on children
- establish purposeful and appropriate links with outside agencies to support the setting's safeguarding procedures and practice
- share information with the local authority and support the authority effectively with any statutory assessments in relation to children's social care needs
- work collaboratively with social workers and other professionals, as appropriate, to provide effective multi-agency planning and support for children who are known, or previously known, to children's social care

Safeguarding information for all staff to know and act on

In gathering evidence about safeguarding information for all staff to know and act on, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that practitioners and other staff have received the training they need for them to know, understand and uphold their safeguarding responsibilities
- have an accurate understanding of children's needs, particularly children with SEND, who often rely on adults to be able to identify safeguarding concerns
- know the range of support available for families
- know that young children may not be able to understand when something happening to them is abuse
- ensure that the setting has policies and procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns about adults, reporting poor safeguarding practices, and whistleblowing

Management of safeguarding

In gathering evidence about the management of safeguarding, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- appoint an appropriate senior member of staff to the role of designated safeguarding lead to carry out the setting's statutory duties to identify, help and protect children
- ensure that the setting's information systems safeguard children effectively from online harm

Safer recruitment

In gathering evidence about safer recruitment, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- receive any required training in safer recruitment and understand and follow safer recruitment practices
- understand and complete the checks required for all staff and all other adults, including visitors, volunteers and contractors
- notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements to make sure these are suitable and safe

Safeguarding concerns or allegations

In gathering evidence about safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff, including agency staff, volunteers and contractors, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have clear procedures and the required record-keeping processes for responding to a safeguarding allegation against any members of staff, including leaders, and against visitors or volunteers; this includes when there are what appear to be low-level concerns
- recognise when they should work with outside agencies, including the local authority and the police, in response to an allegation against a member of staff
- understand the harm threshold and apply this consistently in responding to any safeguarding concern or allegation against a member of staff, including agency staff, volunteers and contractors
- know and follow the processes for making referrals to relevant agencies, including the local authority designated officer (LADO) and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

Grading safeguarding

Not met	Met
<p>The safeguarding standards have been developed from the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the ‘EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers’, ‘EYFS statutory framework for childminders’, ‘Keeping children safe in education’ and ‘Working together to safeguard children’. Safeguarding standards are likely to be ‘not met’ if relevant EYFS requirements are not met and/or any of the following apply:</p> <p>Serious and/or widespread failures in safeguarding practice lead to children, or particular groups of children, being unsafe. Breaches of the statutory requirements for safeguarding have a significant impact on children’s safety, including where the quality of care is such that children have been harmed or are at risk of harm.</p> <p>Leaders have not taken sufficient action to resolve weaknesses following a failure of safeguarding arrangements that meant children may not have been kept safe.</p> <p>Leaders are not open to challenge and/or do not learn from issues or incidents.</p> <p>Leaders do not identify children who may need early help and who are at risk of harm or who have been harmed. This can include, but is not limited to, neglect, abuse, grooming, exploitation, sexual abuse and online harm.</p> <p>Leaders do not actively seek and listen to the views and experiences of children, practitioners and parents, and they do not deal with concerns promptly, when necessary.</p> <p>Leaders do not understand the impact of their policies, processes and systems. They are not receptive to challenge and/or do not reflect on</p>	<p>The safeguarding standards have been developed from the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the ‘EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers’, ‘EYFS statutory framework for childminders’, ‘Keeping children safe in education’ and ‘Working together to safeguard children’. Safeguarding standards are ‘met’ when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners meet their responsibilities to promote the safety of children, in relation to the statutory requirements for safeguarding. Multi-agency working is effective.</p> <p>Parents and children know who to go to for support.</p> <p>Leaders identify children who may need early help and who are at risk of harm or who have been harmed. Practitioners recognise that babies and young children, including those with SEND, may be more vulnerable to abuse and neglect and that they depend on adults to recognise and respond to concerns on their behalf. Leaders and practitioners identify children who are in need of early help or are at risk of harm.</p> <p>All practitioners are vigilant and carry out their responsibilities effectively to keep children safe. They follow the setting’s systems confidently and consistently.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners ensure that other professionals and parents adhere to policies to keep children safe.</p> <p>Leaders manage recruitment safely, ensuring that practitioners have the relevant qualifications and training and have passed any checks required for their roles.</p>

Not met	Met
<p>their own practice to ensure that safeguarding policies, systems and processes are kept under continual review.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners do not follow the requirements for safer recruitment, reporting, referrals and the 'Prevent' duty. Poor record-keeping has a significant impact on children's safety.</p> <p>Leaders do not manage safeguarding concerns or allegations against adults appropriately. They do not fulfil their duty to refer allegations or concerns to relevant agencies, including the LADO and the DBS.</p>	<p>Leaders and practitioners understand and follow the requirements for reporting, referrals, record-keeping and the 'Prevent' duty. Policies and procedures for keeping children safe are clear and accessible.</p> <p>Leaders fulfil their duty to refer allegations or concerns to relevant agencies, including the LADO and the DBS.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that supervision, support and monitoring of adults are appropriate.</p> <p>The conduct and behaviour of staff are appropriate.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners are receptive to challenge and reflect on their own practice so that the impact of safeguarding policies, systems and processes is kept under continual review.</p>

Inclusion

This evaluation area considers how leaders and practitioners identify and support:

- socioeconomically disadvantaged children (those eligible for the early years pupil premium - EYPP)
- children with SEND; this means children receiving special educational needs (SEN) support and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- children who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, such as children in need and looked-after children
- children who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, which may include children who share a protected characteristic

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to inclusion.

These factors are:

- setting high expectations for all children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- embedding a culture in which the early and accurate assessment of children's needs is prioritised
- reducing barriers to children's learning and/or wellbeing to support their development, involving specialists when necessary
- putting in place an EYPP strategy that is well thought through, and is based on evidence of what works well to support the achievement and wellbeing of eligible children
- working closely and effectively with children, parents, professionals and staff and ensuring that children's and parents' views and aspirations are included in decision-making about support for children

Considering inclusion for different ages and provision types

When evaluating inclusion for **children with SEND across different early years settings**, inspectors:

- consider the context of the setting and the type of provision
- work closely with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to evaluate how well the setting identifies and supports children with SEND

In childminder settings, the childminder is likely to assume the role of the SENCo.

For use from 1 September 2026

Gathering evidence about inclusion

Identifying, assessing and meeting needs and reducing barriers

In gathering evidence about identifying, assessing and meeting needs, and reducing barriers, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders identify children's emerging or changing needs quickly and accurately; these include the needs of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- leaders make sure children receive effective support, consult with external specialists and implement their advice as necessary and ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the SEND Code of Practice
- leaders ensure that the strategies that practitioners use to communicate and interact with children, including children who do not communicate verbally, are effective and supportive
- any accessibility planning meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, is implemented effectively and reviewed regularly

Supporting disadvantaged children

In gathering evidence about supporting disadvantaged children, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders ensure that practitioners clearly understand their responsibilities for supporting disadvantaged children
- leaders have a secure understanding of the needs of the disadvantaged children in their setting and use well-founded evidence to inform their approaches, including their decisions about using the EYPP
- the use of the EYPP is closely aligned with the setting's improvement priorities
- leaders make sure that the use of the EYPP is monitored and supported effectively, including through ongoing training for practitioners, and that any adaptations are helpful and appropriate
- leaders' approaches, including their use of the EYPP, have a positive impact on children's achievement and wellbeing

Supporting children with SEND

In gathering evidence about supporting children with SEND, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- a SENCo, when appropriate, has sufficient leadership authority to make a positive difference for children with SEND
- leaders and practitioners identify children's emerging or changing needs quickly and accurately and make sure that children receive effective support, drawing on and implementing specialist guidance, when necessary
- leaders and practitioners use the 'graduated approach' (a continuous cycle of 'assess, plan, do and review'), which helps to ensure that children receive an appropriate level of support

and meets children's needs, and practitioners receive suitable training and support to implement it

- leaders and practitioners make sure that their work improves the achievement of children with SEND and they do not lower their expectations of them
- leaders and practitioners are committed to their role in the local area partnership's strategy to improve the experiences of and outcomes for children with SEND; they promote the local offer and help children with SEND, and their families, to find out what support is available and how to access it
- leaders and practitioners meet the needs of children with SEND and adapt the environment, teaching and the setting's wider offer in ways that support these children to access education
- leaders and practitioners monitor the progress of children with SEND and review reasonable adjustments and support systematically, making any necessary changes to improve their learning or wellbeing

Supporting children who are known (or previously known) to children's social care

In gathering evidence about supporting children who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and practitioners ensure that they identify and meet the individual needs of looked-after children through tailored, high-quality support that promotes their learning and development; leaders and practitioners have regard to personal education plans if any are in place
- the designated safeguarding lead and other leaders use their knowledge of a child's social care status to inform decisions about that child's welfare, such as providing additional educational support, supporting their wellbeing, or reducing any barriers to their attendance
- leaders and practitioners share information effectively with the local authority and support the authority by completing statutory assessments in relation to children's social care needs
- leaders and practitioners work well with social workers, family support workers and other professionals to plan and provide multi-agency support for children who are known (or previously known) to children's social care

Grading inclusion

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Inclusion is likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development and/or safety and welfare.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders have only recently started to take appropriate action to identify and assess children's needs or reduce barriers to children's learning and/or wellbeing. • Weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice have a negative impact on children or on a particular group of children. 	<p>Inclusion meets the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders identify children's needs quickly and accurately, including any emerging or changing needs. This includes the needs of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.</p> <p>Leaders have high expectations for these children. Typically, the support they provide reduces barriers to the children's learning and/or wellbeing.</p> <p>Leaders ask for and implement advice from specialists and external partners, when needed.</p> <p>Leaders take a graduated approach (as explained earlier), which means that children's SEND needs are generally met well.</p> <p>Practitioners receive suitable training and support to implement this approach.</p> <p>Leaders have a secure understanding of these children's needs and progress. They use appropriate evidence to inform their decisions about the EYPP, which has a positive impact on reducing barriers to learning and/or well-being that these children face.</p>	<p>Inclusion meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners establish strategies that consistently enhance the opportunities and experiences of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners are consistent in making sure that the barriers children face are swiftly identified and effectively addressed. They rigorously monitor the progress of children receiving statutory support and those who may also face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. Adaptations are systematically and skilfully adjusted as needed, so that they make a sustained difference to children's opportunities and experiences.</p>

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	<p>When required, the identified SENCo has the knowledge, understanding and skills to make a positive difference for children with SEND.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that, when appropriate, local partnership strategies have a positive impact on the children in the setting.</p>	

For use from 1 September 2026

Urgent improvement

Inclusion is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's safety, wellbeing and/or learning and development, and any of the following apply:

- Leaders do not identify, assess or meet children's needs well enough.
- Support for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, or those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing is ineffective.
- Leaders do not meet the requirements for children receiving additional support and any statutory support, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider inclusion to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Leaders and those responsible for overseeing the setting have a transformational impact on children's individual experiences because of their meticulous approach to promoting inclusion.

Children receive commendable levels of individualised support and guidance, irrespective of the barriers that they may face. Parents are unanimously positive about the unwavering support that they and their child receive from the setting.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Curriculum and teaching

This evaluation area considers:

- whether leaders ensure that they provide all children with a high-quality, ambitious curriculum
- whether leaders and practitioners plan, design and implement the educational programmes of the EYFS statutory framework to create a coherent and sequential curriculum that builds on what children know and can do
- the extent to which the setting's curriculum meets the needs of the range of ages and stages of children who attend, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to high-quality curriculum and teaching.

These factors are:

- constructing an ambitious curriculum that fully meets the intentions, breadth and ambition of the EYFS and is designed to give children the knowledge they need to be ready for their next stage in education, including school, where relevant
- planning and sequencing the curriculum carefully so that children gain knowledge and skills incrementally to reach its ambitious aims
- ensuring that practitioners have expert knowledge of child development and the EYFS educational programmes
- making sure practitioners teach* the curriculum effectively, focusing on the most important knowledge and skills, presenting information clearly, checking children's understanding and adapting their teaching when necessary
- placing a strong focus on communication and language, which underpin all 7 areas of learning and development and are crucial for later success, including academic achievement and good health and wellbeing

* Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities; communicating and modelling language; showing; explaining; demonstrating; exploring ideas; encouraging; questioning; recalling; providing a narrative for what they are doing; facilitating; and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide, the attention given to the physical environment, and the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and using this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

Considering curriculum and teaching for different ages and provision types

When evaluating curriculum and teaching in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- while childminders must meet the same learning and development requirements of the EYFS as group providers, they are likely to work differently from group providers to achieve the same curriculum aims
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors are sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that the childminder is able to continue to meet the needs of the children in their care

When evaluating curriculum and teaching in **before- and after-school settings and holiday provision**, inspectors will recognise that the learning and development requirements of the EYFS do not apply to these settings. This includes childminders who only provide care before and after school, or during the school holidays, for children who normally attend reception (or older) classes during the school day. Therefore, this evaluation area is not applicable to these settings.

When evaluating curriculum and teaching in settings that are exempt from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS, inspectors will consider the exemptions and evaluate the curriculum and teaching against the remaining elements of the EYFS statutory framework. If any individual exemptions are in place for a child or children, providers must be able to demonstrate that they can meet the full requirements of the EYFS, regardless of these exemptions.

Gathering evidence about curriculum and teaching

Leadership of the curriculum and teaching

In gathering evidence about the leadership of the curriculum and teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- understand child development and children's age-appropriate learning and development needs and use this knowledge to set ambitious goals for children to achieve and to be ready for their next stage in education, including school, where relevant
- ensure that the curriculum identifies and sequences the key knowledge that children learn across the EYFS educational programmes
- ensure that practitioners reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their teaching accordingly
- ensure that the curriculum is well taught across the setting and identify areas for improvement, taking effective action to deal with them, including through professional learning

Curriculum design

In gathering evidence about the design of the curriculum, inspectors consider the extent to which the curriculum:

- is designed to teach the 7 areas of learning and development set out in the EYFS, with a particular focus on the 3 prime areas for the youngest children
- is designed to build children's knowledge and skills systematically
- focuses on developing children's knowledge and skills rather than on activities and experiences that leave children's learning to chance

In gathering evidence about the design of the curriculum relating to each area of learning and development, inspectors consider the extent to which:

the **communication and language** curriculum:

- places a strong focus on English vocabulary, oral language and language comprehension
- promotes children's enjoyment and develops their love of stories, rhymes, songs and books
- includes frequent and high-quality interactions between adults and children
- includes oral storytelling and shared reading with plenty of opportunities for repeated practice in a range of contexts

the **physical development** curriculum:

- identifies small steps that, when taught and practised purposefully, lead to proficiency in a physical skill
- enables children to learn and practise what they need and to build on what they already know
- includes explicit modelling and teaching of fundamental movement skills
- provides activities that deepen and extend children's capabilities
- gives children the space and time they need to practise and refine their emerging skills through play

the curriculum for **personal, social and emotional development** (PSED):

- supports children to develop warm, positive relationships and interactions
- enables children to develop a positive sense of self
- helps children to develop an understanding of emotions
- models routines, rules and expectations that help children learn how to get along with each other
- provides opportunities for children to explore, prepare and eat healthy food in supportive and meaningful contexts

the curriculum for **literacy**:

- develops children's communication and language
- inspires children's love of books, songs and rhymes
- includes storytelling and shared book reading

the curriculum for **mathematics**:

- is sequenced so that concepts are introduced and developed carefully, and knowledge and skills are practised frequently
- develops children's confidence in and use of mathematical vocabulary
- is designed to give children a secure grounding in number and operations with number and to develop their spatial reasoning
- helps them to enjoy mathematics so that they use what they know across all areas of learning
- is taught in age- and stage-appropriate ways, through direct instructions, everyday routines and play

the curriculum for **understanding the world**:

- emphasises the importance of children's personal experiences and the books, songs and rhymes they encounter
- enables practitioners to identify the language and knowledge that children need to learn to develop their concept of past, present and future and their knowledge of living things and the natural world
- includes experiences that help children make sense of and learn about the diverse world in which they live
- enables children to learn to use technology safely and purposefully

the curriculum for **expressive arts and design**:

- gives children opportunities to learn and practise skills, to appreciate their own and others' art, and to use what they know in creative ways
- ensures that all children have the early sensory experiences they need
- is clear about how and when new tools, materials, skills, songs, rhymes and stories are introduced
- identifies the vocabulary that children need to express their views and ideas about different art forms and talk about what they think and what they have done
- includes opportunities for children to practise their skills and knowledge in creative ways

High-quality teaching

In gathering evidence about high-quality teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- all practitioners have expert knowledge of child development and the EYFS areas of learning and development, and, when necessary, practitioners are supported to deal with gaps in their knowledge so that children are not disadvantaged by ineffective teaching
- practitioners select activities and experiences after they have determined the curriculum and think carefully about what children already know and can do when deciding what to teach first
- practitioners' choices about what, when and how to teach are effective and tailored to children's ages, stages of development and needs, so that all children benefit from high-quality teaching across all areas of learning
- high-quality interactions support children's learning, ensuring that they have plenty of chances to practise key knowledge and transfer it to long-term memory
- practitioners focus on interacting effectively with children, especially those receiving statutory support or who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- practitioners help children to talk about what they know and understand by supporting them to extend and develop their ideas
- practitioners choose the most effective ways to teach, combining explicit/direct teaching with opportunities for play, so that children learn the intended curriculum
- there is enough time for teaching, practising, revisiting and consolidating the fundamental knowledge and skills that all children need
- practitioners use their day-to-day interactions with children to check what they know and can do, to inform their teaching
- practitioners routinely and swiftly identify children's misconceptions and respond effectively
- practitioners promote children's independence and confidence in their ability to achieve what they set out to do
- teaching and activities focus on concepts that are just ahead of children's current level of thinking, which allows them to learn newer concepts by building on previous concepts that they have securely understood
- practitioners understand how children typically progress in each area of learning and development, so they can build on what children already know
- practitioners check for differences in knowledge and understanding and plan further teaching to ensure that children's early learning is secure

Inclusive curriculum and teaching

In gathering evidence about the inclusive curriculum and teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and practitioners have the knowledge and strategies to reduce any barriers and adapt the curriculum appropriately for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- leaders and practitioners prioritise in their teaching the aspects that children need most support with, making sure that they receive the right help at the right time
- the setting supports all children who are at risk of falling behind the expected stages of communication and language development
- practitioners promote children's understanding of the world and other people and communities beyond their own, and help them to recognise both the similarities between themselves and others and their own uniqueness

Grading curriculum and teaching

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Curriculum and teaching are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders' ambitions for the curriculum and teaching are appropriate, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in implementation mean these have a negative impact on children's progress overall and/or that of particular groups of children. Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve the curriculum and teaching. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. Leaders and practitioners have high ambitions for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. However, support does not keep up with children's changing circumstances or is not well 	<p>Curriculum and teaching meet the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching in their setting. They have a clear action plan to bring about improvement.</p> <p>The curriculum is designed so that, across all areas of learning and development, it is clear what leaders and practitioners want children to know and be able to do. The order in which to teach this, to give children the knowledge and skills they need for their future learning and development, including being ready for school, where appropriate, is also clear.</p> <p>The curriculum is an entitlement for every child. Leaders take effective action to make sure that children access an equally ambitious curriculum. This includes those attending part time or attending more than one setting, disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that the curriculum is typically taught well. They ensure that staff use assessment to check what children know and</p>	<p>Curriculum and teaching meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and of consistently high quality. High expectations for what children can achieve are embedded across the provision. This includes during routines and at all times of the day, such as when children's care needs are being dealt with, at mealtimes and when tidying up.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that highly effective teaching and interactions with children are embedded. Practitioners understand that every interaction they have with a child is an opportunity for teaching and learning. They are skilled at teaching and adapting in the moment to respond to children's emerging thinking, their curiosity and any misunderstanding, providing opportunities for children to excel in their learning and development.</p> <p>Leaders' and practitioners' approach to the curriculum and teaching is focused accurately on children's age-appropriate learning and development needs and draws on expert guidance.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners use teaching and high-quality interactions with children to assess what children know and can do. As a result, practitioners quickly identify any gaps in</p>

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>enough matched to their needs to enable them to achieve these high ambitions.</p>	<p>can do. Teaching is tailored to children's different starting points, needs and stages of development.</p> <p>Practitioners focus on babies' and children's personal, social and emotional development and make sure that they feel safe, secure, stimulated and happy.</p> <p>There is a sharp focus on developing children's communication and language and their love of books.</p> <p>Children's physical development from the earliest age is prioritised, to develop their strength, coordination and positive attitudes to physical activity.</p> <p>Practitioners teach mathematics explicitly. They focus on the mathematical learning that promotes children's confidence in and enjoyment of mathematics.</p> <p>The curriculum recognises and promotes equality and diversity. Practitioners support children to reflect on their similarities and to understand what makes them unique.</p>	<p>children's learning, as well as any children who may face other barriers to their learning, and take prompt and highly effective action.</p>

Urgent improvement

Curriculum and teaching are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's learning and development and any of the following apply:

- Leaders' oversight of staff's implementation of the setting's systems and procedures, routines and interactions is ineffective.
- Practitioners do not teach the curriculum to an acceptable standard.
- The curriculum does not meet the full intention, ambition and breadth of the EYFS requirements.
- The design and sequencing of curriculum content and/or teaching are weak and lack ambition.
- The curriculum and/or teaching do not prepare children to build knowledge and skills for future learning, including for school, where relevant.
- Disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing do not have access to the same ambitious curriculum as their peers; and reasonable adjustments or adaptations are not being made, or are not reducing or removing disadvantage for disabled children, compared to children who are not disabled.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider curriculum and teaching to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards in the curriculum and teaching have been sustained. Across all areas of learning, well-planned, effective and highly responsive teaching quickly and securely develops the knowledge and skills children need to be successful.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the learning of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These children are now exceptionally well prepared for current and later learning, and for future success.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Achievement

This evaluation area considers:

- whether the setting provides a high-quality education that gives all children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, the necessary knowledge so they are ready for the next stage in education, including school, where relevant
- the progress that children make from their starting points across the 7 areas of learning and development set out in the EYFS statutory framework, so that they know more, remember more and can do more

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to achievement.

These factors are:

- children quickly and securely developing the necessary foundational knowledge for accessing later learning
- children gaining detailed knowledge across the 7 areas of learning and development and using this in an age- and stage-appropriate way
- children being supported to make the best possible start in their learning and development, including children who begin to fall behind or do not make progress at the same rate as their peers

When considering these factors, inspectors take account of the different ages, stages and needs of children.

Considering achievement for different ages and provision types

When evaluating the achievement of **different ages of children**, inspectors consider that:

- children develop and learn at different rates
- achievement in the prime areas of learning is vital for all children because these areas of learning underpin all later learning
- development in the prime areas of learning is interlinked
- some children need more targeted time and attention than others
- achievement in the specific areas of learning provides children with opportunities to strengthen and apply the prime areas of learning and helps prepare them for later learning

When evaluating achievement in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors are sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that the childminder is able to continue to meet the needs of the children in their care

When evaluating achievement in **before- and after-school settings and holiday provision**, inspectors will recognise that the learning and development requirements of the EYFS do not apply to these settings. This includes childminders who only provide care before and after school, or during the school holidays, for children who normally attend reception (or older) classes during the school day. Therefore, this evaluation area is not applicable to these settings.

When evaluating achievement in settings that are exempt from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS, inspectors will consider the exemptions and evaluate achievement against the remaining elements of the EYFS statutory framework. If any individual exemptions are in place for a child or children, providers must be able to demonstrate that they can meet the full requirements of the EYFS, regardless of these exemptions.

Gathering evidence about achievement

Inclusive achievement across the EYFS areas of learning and development

In gathering evidence about attainment and progress (achievement) across the EYFS areas of learning and development, inspectors consider the extent to which children have the essential age- and stage-appropriate knowledge and skills for their future success and to progress to the next stage of learning. This includes disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Essential knowledge and skills include:

- language and/or communication and interaction skills that enable children to express themselves to their peers, and an increasingly wide range of adults, and which enable them to access the full curriculum
- a strong foundation in the prime areas, building the roots for children to thrive and providing the basis for learning in all areas
- enjoyment of exploring, the motivation and confidence to try new things, and a sense of pride in achievement
- focusing attention, listening and responding to others, sustaining engagement in interactions and play, and maintaining increasingly high levels of concentration
- physical activity and skills and developing positive attitudes to healthy eating and exertion
- showing a growing curiosity across the areas of learning and development
- developing perseverance and resilience when facing new tasks and challenges, and the skills to move smoothly between different stages of their learning

Grading achievement

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Achievement is likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff identify when children are learning and developing at different rates, but they do not make the adaptations needed to ensure that children achieve well from their starting points. • Leaders understand the needs of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. However, some children or groups of children are not suitably prepared for the next stage of their learning, including school, where relevant. 	<p>Achievement meets the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Children develop age- and/or stage-appropriate knowledge and skills across the 7 EYFS areas of learning and development as they progress through the curriculum.</p> <p>Children are suitably prepared for the next stage of their learning, including school, where relevant.</p> <p>Children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing generally achieve well from their starting points. They receive the necessary support to reach developmental goals and/or age- and stage-appropriate end points of the curriculum.</p>	<p>Achievement meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and both the following apply:</p> <p>Children are very well prepared to transition effectively between different stages of their education, including school, where relevant.</p> <p>Children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing secure breadth and depth in their knowledge and skills within and across all 7 EYFS areas of learning and development. They are very well prepared to make the most of their skills and interests with increasing confidence and independence.</p>

Urgent improvement

Achievement is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's learning and development and either of the following apply:

- Leaders have low expectations of what children can and should achieve.
- Leaders have a poor understanding of when children are learning and developing at different rates and the possible reasons for this. As a result, they have not addressed this with the necessary urgency or as a priority.
- Children are not well prepared for the next stage of their learning or school, particularly disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider achievement to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards of achievement have been sustained. Across all areas of learning, children achieve consistently well, and develop the knowledge and skills to be exceptionally well prepared for their next steps.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the achievement of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These children now achieve and flourish across all areas of their learning and development.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

This evaluation area considers whether:

- leaders and practitioners create an environment that positively supports children's learning, development and care
- leaders and practitioners support children's behaviour and attitudes, including how they teach children to understand and manage their own emotions and behaviour and to relate to others
- settings work with parents to establish routines, including by promoting attendance, so that children, especially those receiving additional funding, including the EYPP, form good habits for future learning
- the setting has an impact on the behaviour, attitudes and routines of children receiving additional support, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines.

These factors are:

- prioritising behaviour and attitudes and establishing clear routines so that all children benefit from the setting's experiences and education
- having clear expectations of behaviour and attendance that all practitioners apply consistently, fairly and effectively
- developing children's motivation and positive attitudes to learning, since these are important predictors of later educational success
- fostering a positive, inclusive and respectful culture, in which staff know, support and care about children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

Considering behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines for different ages and provision types

When evaluating behaviour and attitudes and establishing routines in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors will be sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that they are able to continue to meet the needs of the children in their care

For use from 1 September 2026

Gathering evidence about behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Strategic leadership of behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

In gathering evidence about the leadership of behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- know how effective their practice is, including through analysing patterns and trends, to anticipate and prevent poor attitudes to learning and routines, such as regular attendance, especially for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- have high expectations for all children's behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines, including regular attendance; effective policies communicate these expectations clearly so that everyone, including practitioners and parents, understands them and works consistently to meet them
- ensure that practitioners manage children's behaviour and routines in line with their policies and procedures
- communicate their expectations about behaviour to parents and forge partnerships with them and with other agencies

Positive relationships

In gathering evidence about positive relationships, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- key person arrangements, care practices, routines and warm, positive relationships are effective in promoting children's feelings of security and character development
- key person arrangements support children's emotional development, their self-regulation and their interactions with others
- practitioners know and understand the importance of secure attachments in supporting children to settle well and become increasingly engaged in their learning
- practitioners support children to develop their confidence, resilience and independence
- practitioners teach children the importance of treating others with kindness, care and respect, and they provide positive role models
- explicit teaching of emotional awareness and positive relationships supports children to develop executive function, including self-regulation, cooperation, sharing, listening to others and managing conflicts

Attitudes to learning

In gathering evidence about attitudes to learning, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- children are supported to settle and build positive attitudes to learning, appropriate to their age and/or stage of development

- practitioners teach children to follow routines, to manage their own feelings and behaviour, and to understand how these have an impact on others
- leaders and practitioners act appropriately to support children when they struggle to regulate their behaviour; this includes helping children to be able to suppress or stop a thought, action or feeling ('inhibitory control') so that they can foster positive relationships

Attendance

In gathering evidence about attendance, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and practitioners promote punctuality and attendance and support families to develop routines and positive habits for children's learning and for their future success
- leaders and practitioners work actively with families and a range of professionals, when necessary, to help parents and children to overcome any barriers to attendance, including those due to parents' or children's mental or physical ill health, or to other challenges, especially the families of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- leaders record, monitor and evaluate attendance effectively, drawing on a range of information to identify reasons for poor or irregular attendance; while attendance in the early years is not compulsory, clear routines and regular attendance establish important habits for later success
- leaders follow the setting's attendance policy when children are absent

Inclusive approaches to behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

In gathering evidence about inclusive approaches to behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and practitioners hold high expectations for the achievement of all children in terms of their behaviour and attitudes, taking into account their ages and stages of development
- staff make reasonable adjustments and adaptations when considering children's needs, challenges and barriers, while maintaining high expectations for what those children can achieve
- leaders and practitioners are aware of children's experiences, patterns of attendance and starting points, and they take account of these in adapting what they provide or in taking action so that children are supported to meet the setting's high expectations
- leaders and practitioners monitor, evaluate and adapt specific approaches or provision to reflect children's changing circumstances and/or needs
- support, adjustments and/or interventions are tailored and responsive, enabling disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing to express their feelings appropriately, develop positive attitudes to learning and navigate setbacks confidently, independently and with resilience

Grading behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development and/or safety and welfare.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders set appropriate expectations for children's behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice have a negative impact on children or a particular group of children. • Leaders' actions to improve children's behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines, while appropriate, are at an early stage. This means that it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Leaders understand the needs of children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. However, the support that leaders provide is not well matched to improving children's behaviour, 	<p>Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines meet the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners set high expectations for children's behaviour and attitudes to learning. These expectations are commonly understood by practitioners, parents and children. They are generally applied consistently and fairly. Incidents of poor behaviour, including unkind or discriminatory words and/or actions, when they occur, are quickly addressed.</p> <p>Leaders promote to families the importance of attendance and punctuality.</p> <p>Practitioners teach children the importance of treating others with kindness, care and respect and are positive role models.</p> <p>Practitioners explicitly teach children the executive function skills they need to develop positive attitudes to learning. They help children to focus attention on what matters, screen out anything that is not relevant, hold information in mind to work on it, and focus on a goal and work out when it is necessary to change approaches to achieve that goal.</p> <p>Practitioners understand and consider each child's individual needs and circumstances, including those of disadvantaged children,</p>	<p>Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and both the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders have embedded a harmonious and respectful culture in which children can increasingly manage their own feelings and behaviour. Practitioners consistently enable children's best possible behaviour. They reinforce this through highly impactful teaching of behaviour and routines. As a result, children have consistently positive attitudes to their learning and to each other.</p> <p>Leaders consistently take decisive, evidence-led action to anticipate, identify and tackle barriers to attendance. This work enables children and their families, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, to establish positive routines and significantly improve children's attendance in preparation for starting school.</p>

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>attitudes or establishing routines, or does not keep up with their changing circumstances.</p>	<p>those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning. Any adaptations and/or reasonable adjustments maintain the high expectations of behaviour that reflect the children's ages and stages of development. Practitioners proactively work with other agencies to serve children's best interests.</p> <p>Practitioners give explicit praise to reinforce children's positive behaviour.</p> <p>Children play games and activities collaboratively and get along well with others in a way that is appropriate for their age and/or stage of development.</p>	

Urgent improvement

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's safety, wellbeing and/or learning and development and any of the following apply:

- Leaders and practitioners have low expectations of children's behaviour and/or attitudes and/or their ability to follow routines. As a result, children do not learn the knowledge and skills they need in order to develop positive relationships and attitudes to learning and to be ready for the next stage in their education, including school, where relevant. This leads to a disorderly environment that hinders children's learning.
- Children's needs are not identified or responded to effectively, with the result that they show persistently poor self-control and a lack of respect for others.
- Leaders lack a strategic approach to tackling poor attendance or to supporting families when children's attendance raises concerns. They do not monitor or evaluate children's attendance, or share information with any other settings that a child attends, or work with other agencies, such as the local authority's children's services, in children's best interests.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptional standards of behaviours and attitudes, alongside well-established routines, have been sustained over time so that there is a highly inclusive culture in which all children feel that they belong. Children who need it receive exceptional and tailored support from highly skilled practitioners to improve their behaviour and attitudes, and in establishing routines, with perceptible results in children's attendance and ability to manage their emotions.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on how well disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing flourish.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Children's welfare and wellbeing

This evaluation area considers how the setting:

- promotes children's welfare and wellbeing
- ensures that children receive the care and support they need to achieve and thrive in the setting and beyond

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence, and learning from internal reviews indicate contribute most strongly to children's welfare and wellbeing, giving them the greatest possible opportunity to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

These factors are:

- establishing warm, positive and trusting relationships between key persons and babies and children, so that they are enabled to form secure attachments
- developing children's understanding of how to keep physically healthy and maintain an active lifestyle by providing them with ample opportunities to be active during the day and promoting a healthy diet
- creating an inclusive environment in which there are high expectations for the welfare and wellbeing of all children
- creating a nurturing environment and providing care that is appropriate to babies' and children's needs, ages and/or stages of development, giving particular regard to statutory guidance for safe sleeping arrangements, weaning and safer eating
- promoting equality of opportunity so that all children feel that they belong and understand that individual characteristics make people unique and that they thrive together; this includes, but is not limited to, an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010

When inspectors evaluate children's welfare and wellbeing, they consider only the EYFS safeguarding and welfare requirements that do not already sit within the safeguarding evaluation area and that relate to child protection and suitability. In settings where the safeguarding culture is not open and positive, however, inspectors consider whether the poor culture of safeguarding impacts significantly on children's welfare and wellbeing, according to the standards in this evaluation area.

Considering children's welfare and wellbeing for different ages and provision types

When evaluating children's welfare and wellbeing in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors are sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that the childminder is able to continue to meet the needs of the babies and children in their care

When evaluating children's welfare and wellbeing in **before- and after-school settings and holiday provision**, inspectors recognise that in these group settings, which are solely for children who normally attend the Reception class, it is up to providers to determine the number of staff they require to ensure the safety and welfare of those attending, taking into account the children's ages, stages and needs and the activities being provided.

Gathering evidence about children's welfare and wellbeing

Leadership of children's welfare and wellbeing

In gathering evidence about children's welfare and wellbeing, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that policies, procedures and practices are suitable, robust and followed rigorously, so that the welfare, mental health and wellbeing of all children are promoted
- give particular regard to statutory guidance for safe sleeping arrangements, ensuring that this is understood, implemented and monitored consistently for all children, but especially babies and those under 2 years old
- ensure that children's food is prepared and provided in line with their individual needs, developmental stage and any agreed care or allergy plans
- are systematic in anticipating and identifying individual children or groups of children in need of additional support, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- ensure that practitioners understand their role as a key person in meeting the care needs of individual babies and children, helping them to form secure attachments and promoting their welfare and wellbeing
- ensure that children's emotional and physical wellbeing is promoted and that they are explicitly taught how to stay safe and healthy
- ensure that hygiene practices are effective in meeting the personal care needs of babies and children of all ages
- ensure that children receive healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink

Developing and supporting children's welfare and wellbeing

In gathering evidence about developing children's welfare and wellbeing, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- relationships between children, practitioners and parents are sensitive and responsive and reflect a positive culture
- children build warm and trusting relationships with adults so that they are confident to communicate concerns to practitioners
- practitioners support children to develop their physical and emotional health, and they promote their understanding about healthy food choices, oral health, rest, exercise and screen time
- practitioners encourage children to take appropriate risks and meet challenges as they play and learn, inside and outdoors
- practitioners help children to understand the risks of using digital technology and how to keep themselves safe online
- care practices are tailored effectively to meet children's individual needs, and warm, positive relationships promote their welfare, wellbeing and emotional security

- practitioners ensure that children, particularly babies and those under 2 years old, are placed down to sleep safely; they consistently put into practice safe sleeping arrangements, including making sure that children are in a safe position for sleeping, that the sleep space, bedding, and temperature are appropriate, and that children are supervised
- children are supervised appropriately while eating, including being within sight and hearing of staff, and supported to eat safely
- staff understand and consistently apply arrangements for managing allergies, food intolerances, dietary requirements and choking risks

Inclusive children's welfare and wellbeing

In gathering evidence about inclusive children's welfare and wellbeing, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- relationships are respectful, warm, positive and effective in promoting children's wellbeing and developing in them a strong sense of belonging, especially for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- hygiene and care practices take into account the personal needs of children of all ages, including those with disabilities
- practitioners teach children to become increasingly independent in managing their personal needs
- children respect the different protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and do not tolerate any forms of bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation

Grading children's welfare and wellbeing

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Children's welfare and wellbeing are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's safety and welfare.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders ensure that there are appropriate policies and procedures in place, but these are not developed or implemented well enough to promote children's welfare and wellbeing. • Relationships between practitioners, children and parents are generally effective in promoting secure attachments, wellbeing, a sense of belonging and individual care needs. However, there is some inconsistency and/or a lack of intended impact for particular groups of children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. 	<p>Children's welfare and wellbeing meet the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders establish policies and practices that support children's welfare, mental health and wellbeing. These are generally understood by staff and parents and implemented well across the setting.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that statutory guidance for safe sleeping arrangements, weaning and safer eating is well understood and implemented effectively.</p> <p>Leaders create a safe, welcoming space where children typically enjoy play, learning and social activities and have daily access to outdoor learning.</p> <p>Hygiene practices ensure that the personal needs of babies and children of all ages are met appropriately. Practitioners teach children to become increasingly independent in managing their personal needs.</p> <p>Practitioners teach children about making healthy choices about food, rest, exercise and screen time.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners provide a healthy diet. Practitioners make sure that mealtimes</p>	<p>Children's welfare and wellbeing meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders consistently prioritise children's welfare and wellbeing, ensuring that policies, procedures and practices are rigorously reviewed, strategically adapted and effectively amended.</p> <p>Leaders and practitioners have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the setting's children. They are highly responsive to the varying needs and changing circumstances of individual children and families.</p> <p>Embedded and well-structured routines motivate children to develop long-lasting healthy habits, fostering a solid foundation for self-care, physical health and emotional wellbeing. As a result, children consistently make their own healthy choices and decisions.</p>

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	<p>are opportunities to promote children’s good manners and social skills.</p> <p>Practitioners support children to develop their physical and emotional health. They provide children with the age- and stage-appropriate knowledge that they need to stay safe and healthy.</p> <p>Children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children’s social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging through warm and positive relationships with key persons, which promote their wellbeing effectively.</p>	

Urgent improvement

Children's welfare and wellbeing are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's welfare and wellbeing and any of the following apply:

- Practitioners do not support children's social and emotional wellbeing or prepare them for transitions, whether those are within the setting or to other settings, including schools.
- The key person system does not work effectively to ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs. It does not support children's emotional wellbeing, and children do not develop secure attachments with relevant carers. Leaders and practitioners fail to notice when children need attention.
- Leaders' policies, procedures and practice do not promote children's health and welfare. As a result, children do not know how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
- Leaders have not ensured that statutory guidance on safe sleeping arrangements and/or weaning and safer eating is implemented effectively.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in children's welfare and wellbeing to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards of children's welfare and wellbeing have been sustained. Children and families feel well supported, make a strong, positive contribution to the setting's inclusive culture and are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps, including for school, where appropriate.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the welfare and wellbeing of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These children are now able to thrive in the setting and beyond.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Leadership and governance

This evaluation area considers:

- whether leaders and governors understand and meet the statutory requirements set out in the EYFS
- the commitment of leaders and those responsible for governance to provide high standards of education and care to improve the lives of all children, especially those receiving statutory support, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to leadership and governance of childcare and early education.

These factors are:

- leaders' high expectations for all children at the setting and these being embodied in all staff's day-to-day interactions with them
- leaders' understanding of their setting's strengths and areas for development and the effectiveness of the actions they take to improve the setting and/or to sustain high standards of education and care
- the understanding of leaders and those responsible for governance of their respective roles and their performance of these in ways that enhance the setting's effectiveness
- the thoughtful and positive engagement of parents in ways that support children's education and care
- leaders taking into account the workload and wellbeing of their staff
- leaders' decision-making in the best interests of children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

Considering leadership and governance for different ages and provision types

When evaluating leadership and governance in **childminder settings**, inspectors recognise that:

- childminders are the leaders and practitioners in their setting and, therefore, any references to leaders apply to the childminder; references to practitioners or staff apply to the childminder and any assistants
- childminders often work alone, so inspectors are sensitive to the context of each childminder and work flexibly to ensure that the childminder is able to continue to meet the needs of the children in their care

When evaluating leadership and governance in **settings operating as part of a group**, inspectors recognise that nurseries operating as part of a group may have different structures and/or shared governance arrangements.

When evaluating leadership and governance in settings **where no early years children are present and/or on roll**, inspectors:

- consider this evaluation area only to determine the provider's ongoing suitability to meet the requirements of the EYFS and the childcare register (if applicable)
- grade against the 'expected standard', 'needs attention' and 'urgent improvement' grades only

Gathering evidence about leadership and governance

Strategic leadership

In gathering evidence about strategic leadership, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- demonstrate consistently high standards of suitability and professional conduct, and act in the best interests of children
- establish and sustain the setting's ethos and strategic direction, in partnership with those responsible for governance and through consultation with the setting's community
- have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education and care that prepares children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, for their next stage of education, including school, where appropriate
- take a highly strategic approach to improvement, in which they carefully identify the right priorities to ensure the best possible outcomes and experiences for children
- know, understand and act within the EYFS statutory framework, which sets out their professional duties and responsibilities

Governance

In gathering evidence about governance, inspectors consider the extent to which the nominated individual:

- is knowledgeable about their statutory duties and carries them out effectively
- has an accurate knowledge and understanding of the quality and impact of the setting's work, and ensures that leaders have a clear vision and strategy and that resources are managed well, including for children receiving statutory funding/support
- ensures that leaders remain suitable to carry out their roles and provides effective support and challenge

Staff wellbeing and workload

In gathering evidence about staff wellbeing and workload, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders and governors:

- take account of staff's wellbeing and make sure their workload is manageable; they do not create unnecessary burdens
- have systems in place to protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation; they ensure that incidents of bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation are dealt with
- ensure that staff's time is used as effectively as possible to secure the best outcomes for children
- make sure that all staff feel valued and are supported to do their jobs to a high standard so that morale is high

Professional learning and expertise

In gathering evidence about professional learning and expertise, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders establish a culture of continual improvement, in which everyone is keen to improve their practice for the benefit of children
- leaders pursue their own professional learning activities, acting as positive role models for staff
- leaders ensure that the setting's professional learning and expertise programme enables staff to implement:
 - the setting's approaches to behaviour and to establishing routines
 - the setting's overall curriculum and especially the communication and language and mathematics curriculums
 - the necessary adaptations for children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
 - practice that supports the care needs of babies, including safe sleeping arrangements, weaning and safer eating
- staff continually seek to improve their expertise, drawing on appropriate evidence, the practice of others and coaching, to good effect

Parental and community engagement

In gathering evidence about parental and community engagement, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the setting works in partnership with parents to secure the best education and care for children
- practitioners share information with parents and other agencies about children's needs and progress, including the progress check at age 2, and support parents to extend their children's learning at home
- leaders work with other settings and organisations to develop early years practice that improves the quality and safety of education and care for all children

Grading leadership and governance

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>Leadership and governance are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met but breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's learning and development and/or safety and welfare.</p> <p>This may include when one or more of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders have a broad awareness of the setting's strengths and areas for development, but their actions lack precision and/or do not identify underlying causes of any weakness. • Leaders' actions to bring about improvement are largely focused on the right areas for development, but do not lead to improvement quickly enough. • The nominated individual understands their broad roles and responsibilities but does not support and/or challenge leaders well. • Leaders are conscious of the implications that any changes to practice may have for staff's workload, but they do not do enough to manage that workload or to avoid unnecessary burdens. • Leaders have a broad programme of professional learning and expertise, but it is 	<p>Leadership and governance meet the 'expected standard' when relevant EYFS requirements are met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders understand the setting's context, strengths and areas for development. They are ambitious for children, taking appropriate action to drive improvement and/or maintain high standards of education and care. When improvements are needed, leaders' actions are timely and effective.</p> <p>The nominated individual ensures that leaders have a suitable vision and strategy for the quality of provision and that resources are managed well. They typically support and challenge leaders appropriately, giving due regard to leaders' wellbeing and workload.</p> <p>Leaders provide regular, relevant and appropriate professional learning and expertise opportunities and constructive feedback for all practitioners, which equips them to carry out their roles successfully.</p> <p>Leaders take action to ensure that staff feel valued and workload is manageable. They avoid creating unnecessary burdens.</p> <p>Leaders engage with parents and professionals thoughtfully and positively in a way that supports children's education and care. This includes at times of transition, to enable</p>	<p>Leadership and governance meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply:</p> <p>Leaders use their detailed and perceptive analysis of the setting's strengths and areas for improvement, alongside any changes in context, to understand the effectiveness of their provision, working in partnership with the nominated individual, when appropriate. They are adaptive and responsive to the setting's changing needs and circumstances so that they have a consistent focus on securing excellence for all children.</p> <p>Leaders ensure that a culture of high expectations and professionalism is embedded across the setting. Staff make a consistently strong, positive contribution to improving the quality of provision. This makes a significant, positive difference to children's education and care.</p> <p>Leaders have instilled a culture of continuous improvement in which staff consistently ask for, accept and offer feedback as part of improving their practice and the provision overall. Professional learning and expertise opportunities are of high quality and are precisely matched to improvement priorities and the individual needs of practitioners. They</p>

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
<p>overly generic or insufficiently targeted on improving practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders have engaged with parents and with other professionals, but this has been limited and/or not targeted appropriately. 	<p>children to settle quickly when they start at the setting and move on seamlessly to other settings or school, when appropriate.</p>	<p>have a positive impact on the quality of provision and on practitioners' practice.</p> <p>Leaders' consistently thoughtful and positive engagement with parents, including those who are harder to reach, ensures that children thrive in all aspects of their development and are exceptionally well prepared at times of transition.</p>

For use from 1 September 2016

Urgent improvement

Leadership and governance are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when breaches of the EYFS requirements have a significant impact on children's safety, wellbeing and/or learning and development and any of the following apply:

- Leaders are not suitable and/or do not act in children's best interests. This might include where there are concerns about leaders' integrity and their decisions relating to provision for children who receive statutory support, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.
- Leaders have not ensured safe sleeping arrangements and/or weaning and safer eating.
- Leaders do not have the capacity to improve the quality of education and care.
- Actions taken to tackle areas for development have been insufficient or ineffective.
- Links with parents and with other settings and professionals involved in supporting children's education and care are weak.
- Staff workload is unsustainable.
- Where relevant, the nominated individual is unclear about their statutory duties in relation to leaders' wellbeing and does not support them appropriately.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in leadership and governance to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards of leadership and governance have been sustained. Leaders at all levels, those responsible for governance, and all staff make a strong, positive contribution to the setting's strategic priorities. This leads to continued improvement and/or sustained high standards in all areas of the setting's work.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These children achieve and thrive.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own setting and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other settings, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks.