

1. INTRODUCTION

The survey evaluates the impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage on the quality of provision and developmental outcomes for young children from birth to five years. The report is based on discussions with 12 local authorities and visits to 68 Early Years Foundation Stage providers between **September and December 2010**. It examined the work of providers across the sector from large primary schools to childminders working alone with one or two children. The survey focused particularly on two areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. It also considered a range of other factors that are drivers or barriers to improvement.

In July 2010 Children's Minister Sarah Teather asked Dame Clare Tickell to carry out a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and this report is intended to inform that review.

2. KEY FINDINGS

Provision and outcomes

- Outcomes in personal, social and emotional development were satisfactory or better in all the schools and childcare providers visited.
- The keys to good outcomes in personal, social and emotional development in the childcare providers surveyed were the routines that practitioners established and the high expectations that they had of children's behaviour. In this area of learning, outcomes were very similar for the childminders and childcare providers on non-domestic premises.
- Children's personal, social and emotional development was better where the providers visited were clear about the stages of learning and development and specifically planned activities to cover all aspects of this area of learning.¹
- Outcomes for communication, language and literacy were good or outstanding in 42 of the 68 providers visited. This was because practitioners were specifically planning opportunities to develop children's speaking and listening, and early reading and writing skills. This could often be traced back to specific training, for example, in developing children's language skills or in delivering phonics.
- In 18 of the 43 childcare providers visited, children's speaking and listening skills were stronger than their early reading and writing skills, while in the others they were similar. This was more because conversation was part of everyday activities, than because providers intended to prioritise this.
- Children's language for thinking was weaker than their language for communication in 13 of the providers surveyed, including some good and outstanding providers. This was usually because practitioners missed opportunities to encourage children to explain and extend their thinking, or simply did not allow time for children to think.
- Assessment of children's learning and development was good or outstanding in 21 of the 25 schools visited, but only in 15 of the 43 childcare providers. It was inadequate in seven childcare providers but no schools.
- Inspectors found that where assessment was underdeveloped it tended to focus more on children's welfare or their interests, rather than their learning.
- Provision for different groups of children was variable in the providers visited. Schools were more likely to be evaluating the performance of different groups and to be familiar with strategies to overcome barriers to learning, particularly for boys. However, inspectors found that the extent to which schools identified and met the specific needs of different groups was mixed.
- The childcare providers visited, particularly childminders, tended to focus on children as individuals rather than consider the specific needs of different groups, other than those with identified additional needs, in which case they knew how to access external support or advice.

¹ The strands of personal, social and emotional development set out in the *Practice guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* are: dispositions and attitudes; self-confidence and self-esteem; making relationships; behaviour and self-control; self-care; and sense of community.

Drivers for improvement

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

Barriers to improvement

- Self-evaluation and action planning were judged to be good or outstanding in only just over a third of the childcare providers visited. Self-evaluation was inadequate in four of the 20 childminders and three of the 23 childcare providers on non-domestic premises visited. In contrast it was good or outstanding in 22 of the 25 schools visited.
- Self-evaluation and action planning were too often seen by childcare providers as something that had to be done rather than a means of improving outcomes for children. However, outcomes for children were no better than satisfactory in any of the providers where self-evaluation was inadequate.
- A difficulty for all types of providers visited, including the good or outstanding ones, was involving parents in ongoing assessments of their child's learning
- Inspectors found little evidence of ongoing communication about children's learning between the different Early Years Foundation Stage providers that a child might use during the course of a day or week

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Any changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage should:

- reflect that provision and outcomes in the early years have improved overall, and all types of providers can and do deliver the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage well;
- consider how to address the existing differences in capacity and quality of provision between the different types of providers;
- take account of the importance of good qualifications for all types of providers;
- be clear that good quality assessment is an integral part of effective planning for young children's learning and development;
- recognise the currently slow rate of improvement in outcomes for some groups of children, including Traveller children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities;
- be clear that self-evaluation is a weakness in some types of provision and is at the heart of improving outcomes for children;
- consider how to promote more effective partnership working and especially the exchange of information between the different providers that a child may encounter in the course of a day or a week.

Local authorities should:

- consider how training, support and challenge can be targeted to address the existing differences in capacity and quality of provision between the different types of provider.

All providers should:

- consider how to develop more effective partnership working between the different providers that a child may encounter in the course of a day or a week.

Childcare providers in particular should:

- take account of the links between good quality assessment and planning for children's learning and development and better outcomes;
- take account of the fact that self-evaluation and action planning are integral to improving outcomes for children.

The full report can be viewed/downloaded at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/> > click on Publications and Research heading > enter impact of early years in the Search field