

# EXPECTING



Having your practice assessed by Ofsted will always be a stressful experience -the key is to be ready for their arrival, whenever that might be,

says **Melanie Pilcher...**

**A**n Ofsted inspection can seem like a very daunting prospect - and the thought of having 'Ofsted' arrive without notice one morning, inspectors observing your practice, compiling notes and then making a judgement that could stay with you for the next four years, is, quite understandably, going to cause some level of anxiety, because it feels like everything hinges on what happens on the day. Even those providers who proclaim that they welcome their Ofsted inspection because it gives them the chance to show just how good they are will probably admit to a sense of relief once it is all over and the final judgement has been made known.

Ofsted's aim is clear for all to see; they want to bring about improvement through inspection, focusing their efforts more on the settings that are currently 'coasting' at 'satisfactory' - they like the rest of us, want to ensure that provision for young children is as good as it can be. The decision to replace the current 'satisfactory' grade with that of 'requires improvement' further reinforces this message. With this in mind, the effectiveness of leadership and management in monitoring and improving the quality of your provision should clearly demonstrate these shared aims. Where this is the case and the inspector does not have to search for proof, your inspection is more likely to be a positive experience for all involved, just as it should be.

## BE PREPARED

Nobody should need to make special preparations for inspection day. Ofsted do not expect you to do so, but they do expect every provider to be able to show that they are working confidently to the Early Years Foundation Stage and the requirements for registration at all times. If

you are, then there should be no need to make any 'extra arrangements', or to suddenly have to implement a contingency plan because an Ofsted Inspector is ringing the doorbell. In fact, having to maintain a state of high alert in this way is really stressful for all involved. On inspection day, practice or behaviour that is contrived for the inspector's benefit will be obvious, as it cannot possibly demonstrate the elements of leadership and management that underpin continuous quality improvement in your setting.

Adding further weight to the argument that you should be prepared at all times is the fact that Ofsted use a risk assessment to decide if a further full inspection is needed within the current inspection cycle - for example, if they receive a complaint about your setting, or other information they hold indicates a deterioration in your provision or potential risks to children. The message is that Ofsted could inspect you at any time - the expectation is that if and when they do, they will see your normal practice, not a show or a rehearsed routine that has been put on for the day.

## QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

There is absolutely no doubt that those settings that have a strongly embedded tendency to be reflective, with robust systems in place for self-evaluation, will already be aware of the inspection judgement they are

### findoutmore

Visit the **Pre-school Learning Alliance**, [pre-school.org.uk](http://pre-school.org.uk), to find out more about the free training that is available to your setting if you become a member.

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**PRACTICE THAT IS CONTRIVED FOR THE INSPECTOR'S BENEFIT WILL BE OBVIOUS, AS IT CANNOT POSSIBLY DEMONSTRATE THE ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT THAT UNDERPIN CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

likely to get at any time. They know what they need to do to improve and what their strengths and weaknesses are, before having to read about them in an Ofsted report. When you are inspected, the inspector will make his or her judgements in each area by considering whether you meet the descriptors for 'good' or not - that is their starting point. The grade descriptors for 'good' are far more detailed than the other grade descriptors in the inspection schedule for this very reason. They should therefore be the basis for your own evaluative activity on an ongoing basis. Ofsted make it very clear that only 'good' is good enough!

Resources such as Ofsted's self-evaluation form (SEF), which is aligned with the inspection judgements, will help you to decide how well you are doing. Whether you use Ofsted's SEF or not, the inspector will want to see that your self-evaluation is a continuous process that is clearly evident in your practice. Evidence of self-evaluation should come from each and every aspect of your provision as a shared course of action involving every member of the team. The inspector should not need to search for proof

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of self-evaluation - it should be obvious in the way that individuals respond to the inspector's questions, give feedback from shared observations, plan for individual children and, of course, record their findings and the actions to be taken as a result.

If the SEF is one of the means by which you are demonstrating an awareness of how well you are doing, it is accreditation schemes, such as the Alliance's highly acclaimed 'Reflecting on Quality', that really demonstrate a commitment to continuous quality improvement; they facilitate a process of 'observe, reflect, improve, review' as a continuous process that becomes the norm in settings that embrace it. Quality improvement is more than just ensuring that what you are doing is 'good enough' - it's an element of practice that is owned by your whole team and sends a very clear message to the inspector that the children in your care are getting the best possible start in life, with every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

## MEETING EXPECTATIONS

As previously mentioned, the starting point for inspectors is whether the setting is good, or not; Dame Claire Tickell, who undertook the review of the EYFS that we are all now working with, spoke at Ofsted's first annual lecture, held in London on 3rd December 2012, and stated "good is obvious, it sings out to you". If this is the case, as with all good tunes, there must be a catchy melody and harmony, which can only come from settings that are 'in tune' with what is expected from them and 'tuned in' to what they need to do to continuously improve.

Many practitioners still feel that they need to be told what it is that Ofsted are looking for when they inspect, as if it is a well hidden secret, understood only by those who have managed to crack the secret code; this could not be further from the truth, and in the second article in this series we will consider the resources that are readily available to you, and how you can take part in the inspection with confidence, ensuring that every member of your staff understands what Ofsted will expect to see on the day.

**Melanie Pilcher is policy and standards manager at the Pre-school Learning Alliance.**



## CHANGE IS COMING

As this issue was going to press, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, announced his toughening up of early years inspections. From 4th November 2013:

- a judgement of 'requires improvement' will replace the current 'satisfactory' judgement for all early years providers - as it has already for schools and colleges;
- preschools and nurseries requiring improvement will have a maximum of two years to get to 'good' (the minimum expected standard) - otherwise they face the prospect of being judged 'inadequate';
- there will be re-inspection within a year for those that 'require improvement' with the expectation that the setting will get to 'good' within two years;
- those that fail to improve after two years are likely to be judged 'inadequate'.

The new inspection framework will be published in full in September. For more information, visit [ow.ly/nFibT](http://ow.ly/nFibT)