

[Home](#) > [Parenting, childcare and children's services](#)

- > [Childcare and early years](#) > [Providing childcare](#)
- > [Children's centres, childminders, pre-schools and nurseries](#)
- > [Guides for parents: how early years settings are inspected](#)



Guidance

How Ofsted inspects nurseries and other types of daycare

Updated 20 March 2024

Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Why Ofsted inspects daycare providers](#)

[How often we inspect](#)

[How long inspections last](#)

[How much notice we give](#)

[What an inspection looks like](#)

[The COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Speaking to the inspector](#)

[Information about the judgements we make](#)

How we inspect and report on safeguarding

Gathering personal information on inspection



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Introduction

This guide is for you if you are a parent of a child who receives early years education and care at a group setting registered with Ofsted, such as a day nursery or sessional pre-school.

Why Ofsted inspects daycare providers

We have to inspect daycare by law.

We inspect daycare providers under our [education inspection framework \(EIF\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>). These inspections give you information about the quality of education and care your child is receiving. They also check that the people who do this remain suitable to look after children and that they are meeting the [statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>).

How often we inspect

We usually inspect new daycare providers within 30 months of registration and then at least once every 6 years.

We inspect more often if we receive a concern about a daycare provider and we assess any risks that we know of. How quickly we inspect or visit depends on how serious the concern is.

If we decide that a daycare setting's provision for children is inadequate, we usually re-inspect within 6 months. If we can, we re-inspect daycare settings judges as requires improvement within 12 months. See [information about the judgements we make](#).

How long inspections last

An inspection will not normally take longer than 6 hours.

If the daycare offers restricted hours, inspections usually take about 4 hours. Sometimes, the inspection may take longer than this, such as in larger settings. The inspector will let the provider know as soon as possible if this is going to be the case. The inspector will be mindful that the provider must supervise children and continue to always meet their needs during the inspection.

How much notice we give

We ring the daycare at around midday on the working day before the inspection.

There are some situations when we inspect without giving any notice. This is normally when the daycare was inadequate at its last inspection or because concerns have been raised that indicate they may not be meeting requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS).

Your child's setting must let you know that they are going to be inspected. We'll also give them a poster to display on their door while the inspection is taking place.

What an inspection looks like

Inspectors want to know what it is like for your child at their setting. They will spend most of their time observing the daily routines and activities that staff provide. This helps the inspectors to judge how well the daycare provider promotes children's learning, progress, safety and well-being. It also means that they can tell the daycare provider what they are doing well and what they need to improve.

Inspectors will not do anything that disrupts children's daily routine. They will explain to staff that their care for the children must still be their priority. The inspector will work around them and the children.

Some of the things inspectors do on an inspection are:

- look at how staff keep children safe
- watch the children play
- ask children what they're learning from the activities and experiences staff provide them with
- ask staff about how engaged the children are and how much they understand
- talk to parents about what they think of the care and education provided
- observe the interactions between the childminder and children and how well the childminder supports their communication and language development
- talk to staff about their assessment of what children know and can do, and how they are supporting children to develop further
- make sure that the staff meet all their legal responsibilities, including for vulnerable children

At the end of the inspection, the inspector will tell the daycare provider what the judgement is. They will also go through the findings and tell the provider what their strengths and weaknesses are.

The report is published a few weeks later on our website. The daycare provider should provide you with a copy.

The COVID-19 pandemic

We take into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption it has caused. The inspector will ask staff about any ongoing impact of the pandemic and how they are dealing with the situation. They will include this in the inspection judgement.

Speaking to the inspector

You may have the chance to speak to the inspector, for example when you drop off or collect your child. Your views will help the inspector to determine how well the setting works with parents to support children's learning and well-being. Inspectors try to speak to parents without staff present so that you feel comfortable to share your views openly.

The daycare provider may arrange a telephone conversation with the inspector if you are unable to speak to the inspector in person and would like to. The inspector will want to hear from you about:

- what staff tell you about your child's learning and how to support their learning at home
- what you know about what staff are doing to support your child's development (sometimes referred to as 'next steps')
- what staff tell you about the progress your child is making
- how any funding is being used to support any individual needs

Inspectors cannot deal with complaints concerning individual children. Nor can they settle disputes between parents and the daycare provider. If you are worried about your child's daycare provision, you should start by talking directly to the provider first. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive, you can follow Ofsted's [complaints process](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure>).

Information about the judgements we make

Inspectors judge the daycare provision for:

- overall effectiveness
- the quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management

The judgements are:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement

- inadequate

If there are no children present it will not be a full inspection. The inspector will still check that the daycare provider is suitable to be registered. Instead of the grades listed above, they will decide whether or not 'Overall quality and standards of the early years provision' are met or not met.

If the daycare provider is not meeting EYFS requirements but can fix this quickly, the inspector will tell the daycare what to do to improve.

If the daycare provider is not meeting requirements and is risking children's health, safety and well-being, the daycare provider will receive a 'welfare requirements notice'. Ofsted will check that the daycare has done what they need to before the next inspection.

How we inspect and report on safeguarding

Every setting must have an open, positive culture of safeguarding that puts children's interests first. You can [find more information about what this means in our handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif/early-years-inspection-handbook-for-ofsted-registered-provision-for-september-2023#safeguarding) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif/early-years-inspection-handbook-for-ofsted-registered-provision-for-september-2023#safeguarding>).

Our inspectors will always look at how well the setting helps and protects children so that they are kept safe. Inspectors will consider the safeguarding culture that the setting has established when making a judgement. They will consider a range of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

The [Early Years Foundation Stage](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework-2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework-2>) (EYFS) statutory framework sets out the requirements that providers must meet. If the setting is not meeting one or more of these, inspectors will consider the impact that this is having on children's safety and well-being when making a judgement about safeguarding.

The safeguarding section of the inspection report will tell you if the arrangements for safeguarding at the setting are effective or not effective. If we judge safeguarding to be ineffective, the main body of the report will explain the weaknesses that were found. The report will include any actions the setting needs to take to meet the safeguarding and welfare requirements. If we judge safeguarding to be ineffective, the setting can only be judged inadequate. This means that inspectors will usually return to inspect the setting again within 6 months.

Gathering personal information on inspection

Inspectors need to collect some personal information during an inspection. The law gives inspectors the right to enter property, gather information or take copies. They record information on Ofsted's systems but all notes or copies are only kept centrally and securely.

If you want more information, you can read our [privacy notice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notice/childcare-ofsted-privacy-notice) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notice/childcare-ofsted-privacy-notice>).

[Read our other guides for parents](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guides-for-parents-how-early-years-settings-are-inspected)

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[↑ Back to top](#)

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