



Practical Insights: Preparing for Ofsted's Early Years Inspections

Practical steps to feel confident, ready,
and inspection-prepared

Celebrate – Validate – Highlight

mbk
EARLY YEARS



What's New (at a glance)

Ofsted have confirmed the changes to the education inspection and unveiled new look report cards in their Early Years Toolkit, alongside an operating guide and inspection information publications.

KEY CHANGES for Early Years:

Live from
10 November
2025



Report Cards will replace the single overall grade with a new 5 point grading scale across more evaluation areas



A new planning call to follow on from the notification call



Nurseries & childminders will be inspected *more frequently*



Emphasis on inclusion (including SEND & vulnerable children) in inspections



Safeguarding has a distinct decision is **met** or **not met**, with explicit indicators



Inspectors' approach emphasises professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect throughout



Increased focus on well being and workload of professionals

Ofsted are very much looking to improve the way they inspect education.

Their responses to the consultation were published in September 2025 and the following actions concerning early years were:

1. Early years routine inspections will shift from every 6 years to every 4 years (from April 2026)
2. Newly registered early years providers will have their first full inspection within 12-18 months of registration (reducing the previous wait time of up to 30 months)
3. If an early years provider receives "needs attention" or "urgent improvement" in any evaluation area, reinspection will happen: within 12 months if "needs attention", and within 6 months if "urgent improvement"



How Inspections Will Now Run *(so you can prep smart)*

Notification Call

You'll receive a notification call from Ofsted about the inspection **by 10am**.

The inspector will confirm:

- The type of provision (nursery, pre-school, childminder, out-of-school)
- The scale/length of the inspection (normally one day; very large nurseries may have two inspectors)
- The manager/nominee who will lead the inspection on your side

They will also agree a time for a planning call later the same day (for nurseries/out-of-school) or can be within 5 working days (for childminders)

The Nominee

You may select a member of staff to be a nominee.

They may support planning, communication and engagement throughout the Inspection. Their involvement should start from the planning call. Training is available to be a nominee, although not a requirement. The role of the nominee is not generally used and often only needed for very large settings.

Planning Call (30 minutes)

The inspector will want to build a clear picture of your setting before arriving. This is normally via a video call.

They will ask about:

- The contextual information about your nursery (size, staff, ages, SEND profile, safeguarding issues)
- Your current priorities, challenges and improvement actions
- Information about children they may case-sample (SEND, disadvantaged, EYPP, known to social care) and your approach to inclusion
- Your self-evaluation of where you are on the 5-point scale in each evaluation area
- What your curriculum ambitions are for the children
- Your daily timetable in order to plan the inspectors activities and discussions for the day

This is your chance to highlight what you're working on and agree any reasonable adjustments (e.g. if a key staff member is absent)

Use regular
nursery
documents
only

On the Day of Inspection

Inspectors usually arrive early and aim to finish by 5pm, adapting to your routines.

The day will include:

- Observations of teaching, care, interactions, and routines across age groups
- Discussions with the manager/nominee and staff (reflective, not confrontational)
- Safeguarding checks – staff knowledge, records, culture
- Sampling of evidence from day-to-day documents

Inspectors will check in on leaders and staff wellbeing and show flexibility to minimise stress and disruption.

Feedback & After the Visit

During the day there will be ongoing reflective discussions and a grading discussion. At the end of the day, there's a final feedback meeting with leaders and any appropriate others.

- Inspectors will share indicative judgements (provisional until moderation is complete)
- You'll then receive a full report card with grades for each evaluation area and narrative text, normally within 30 working days
- If safeguarding is judged "Not Met" or urgent weaknesses are found, Ofsted will explain next steps immediately (e.g. reinspection or enforcement)



What Inspectors Will Look At

“Inspectors will look for clear evidence that every child—especially those with SEND or known to social care—has their needs identified early and is supported through well-planned, multi-agency action.”

Expect focused evidence against the toolkit's areas



Safeguarding

Open culture; vigilant staff; effective referrals; safer recruitment; clear allegation processes. (Graded 'met/not met' with precise indicators.)



Inclusion

Identification & support for SEND/disadvantaged/known to social care, reasonable adjustments, effective multi-agency work



Curriculum & Teaching

Ambitious, sequenced curriculum; strong communication & language; daily practice seen in action



Achievement

What children know, can do, and the impact of support on progress/gaps



Behaviour, Attitudes & Routines

Calm, consistent routines; positive behaviour; independence



Children's Welfare & Well-being

Emotionally safe; healthy; thriving day-to-day



Leadership & Governance

Integrity; continuous improvement; staff wellbeing; parent partnership

Grading: what it looks like

Inspections now use a 5-point scale on the report card across evaluation areas (more nuanced than one overall grade). Inspectors will consider both standards (the quality of provision) and expectations (the resulting impact).

Examples of outcomes in the early years

Expected standard = you meet toolkit expectations.

Strong Standard = you exceed toolkit expectations

Exceptional = Your work is of the highest standard.

Needs attention = shortfalls without significant risk; actions set.

Urgent improvement = significant impact on safety/well-being/learning OR suitability concerns; enforcement may follow.

Safeguarding is met when all safeguarding standards are **met** (minor issues can be rectified during/soon after), '**not met**' triggers reinspection/enforcement as needed.

Exceptional means...

Practice is exemplary and significantly exceeds the expected standard. Children flourish across all areas of learning and development and staff model the very best practice.

Urgent Improvement means...

There are serious weaknesses that put children's safety, welfare or development at risk. Leaders are either unable or unwilling to secure rapid improvement and enforcement action is likely.

Concrete Examples

Be ready to explain how your setting would move from 'Expected' to 'Strong' or 'Exceptional'—inspectors will ask for concrete examples of sustained impact, not just plans. For example, you might demonstrate strong standards in curriculum planning (well-structured, reflective, consistent), which in turn leads to exceptional expectations being met (children highly-motivated, articulate, confident and making excellent progress).

"Outstanding/Good" logos must be removed after your first graded inspection under the new approach.

Evidence: what to have ready (and what not to create)

Having clear, up-to-date documents that are easy to access reflects best practice. Whatever your setting's context, organised and accessible evidence demonstrates strong leadership and effective preparation for Ofsted.

Have accessible (digital or print)

- ✓ Paediatric first-aid records and staff certificates
- ✓ DBS/safer recruitment summary & vetting/employment checks
- ✓ EYFS-required policies; records of LADO referrals & outcomes; list of children open to social care/multi-agency plans
- ✓ Live improvement plans and self-evaluation
- ✓ Notes from the planning call to show your priorities and context

Arrange time for

- ✓ Meeting with the designated safeguarding lead
- ✓ Meeting with the SENCo
- ✓ Meeting with the leadership team
- ✓ Meetings with parents

Do NOT create new folders “for Ofsted”: inspectors only want normal, live documents, proportionate to your setting.

Everyday Success Diary

The Everyday Success Diary is your ultimate tool for excellence in early years leadership. It helps you elevate daily practice through structured reflection, evidence of impact, and continuous improvement. Designed to align with Ofsted's focus on purposeful self-evaluation, it turns everyday actions into meaningful evidence of excellence and ongoing development.



Scan the QR code and get your Everyday Success Diary



Practical Prep Checklists

(Leader & Rooms)

Demonstrate clear evidence of progress and achievement - show how recent actions have strengthened your provision and outcomes for children over time.

Are you ready to shine through:

Summarise strengths & priorities clearly

☐

Showing a live improvement plan (Everyday Success Diary)

☐

Explaining your ambitious, sequenced curriculum & ensuring teaching is effective

☐

Explaining how you identify & support SEND/disadvantaged/social-care-known children; how you make reasonable adjustments and agency links and referrals

☐

Showcasing safeguarding: your culture, training, safer recruitment, allegations process, referrals, "it could happen here" mindset

☐

Discussions on wellbeing: how you manage staff workload; how you'll request reasonable adjustments if needed during inspection

☐

Children are consistently achieving and prepared for their next steps

☐

Room teams / Practitioners are they:

Confident on routines, behaviour expectations, and communication & language strategies seen every day

☐

Ready to show typical progress with light-touch resources (photos/notes you already use e.g. Everyday Success Diary)

☐

Able to articulate that they know who to tell and how for ANY safeguarding concern

☐

Clear on how the curriculum supports each child's progress

☐

Be ready to explain...

Situations where reflection has led to measurable improvement - evidence how these changes have become embedded in daily practice.

Next Steps & MBK Early Years Support

Use our services to rehearse the planning call, have an Ofsted Experience Day and measure your on-the-day confidence.



Book an **MBK inspection-readiness run-through**
(we'll simulate notification → planning call → on-site focus)



Grab our **Everyday Success Diary** for daily walkabouts aligned to your self-evaluation and the key-information sheet for the initial phone call.



Join **Management Mastery Programme** for leadership conversations, safeguarding culture and confidence and team dynamics



Review our Products to provide staff with key essential knowledge tools

Discovery Call

Protect your current grading over all 7 evaluation areas.

Book your **FREE Discovery Call** today and get tailored advice on how your team can stay inspection-ready.

- ✓ Spot risks before Ofsted does
- ✓ Get practical solutions, not tick-box fixes
- ✓ Build a confident, capable team



Scan the QR code
to book your
Discovery Call

A fresh pair of eyes!

We are a confident nursery group, but it's always good to have someone come in with a fresh pair of eyes and to give ideas and feedback where needed.

Corrinne Hendrickson, Manager, Busy Little Bees





Your Rating
Your Reputation
Your Responsibility

And with MBK

Your Readiness





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EARLY YEARS

01527 222907

www.mbkgroup.co.uk | team@mbkearlyyears.co.uk

Millennium House, High Street, Studley B80 7HJ

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