

# Getting it right first time

Achieving and maintaining high-quality early years provision

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Since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008, the proportion of good and outstanding early years providers has risen. However, while the majority of the previously good or outstanding providers retained that judgement in their most recent inspection, four in 10 of those previously judged satisfactory remained the same. They are simply not improving fast enough.

This report describes features of strong leadership and the ways in which leaders develop and sustain high-quality provision. It draws on Ofsted's reports and visits to providers, case studies of good practice and focus groups. It also uses research findings.

**Age group:** 0–5

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**Published:** July 2013

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**Reference no:** 130117



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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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## Foreword by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector



I am very grateful to all the settings we visited for this good practice report. We have visited some impressive environments where strong leaders have made sure that children get off to a great start with high levels of achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

I have said many times since my arrival at Ofsted that the importance of early years is beyond question. We all know from the research that children's early years are a period of rapid development and vital for building a secure foundation for future personal and academic success. But, a significant minority of children are simply not ready for school when they arrive in reception classes and too many do not get the high-quality provision they need to make a secure start. Our inspections show a strong correlation between low-quality provision and poorer areas, particularly among childminders.

The settings we visited for this survey have strong leaders who are determined to 'get it right first time' for children. The leaders understand that they are only as 'good' as the quality of the interaction between adults and children. They are not afraid to set high expectations and to introduce structures that help children's learning. They ensure that children are given clear routines and procedures that help build self-assurance as well as awareness of others' needs. This means that they are not afraid to teach children and to ensure that their staff are highly skilled adults who improve the vocabulary, cognitive and social skills of very young children, particularly when they are not able to gain them at home.

Last year I decided that only a good standard of school and college education was good enough and I now intend to take similar steps with early years providers. I do hope that you find this survey report helpful and that it provides an insight into the features of strong leadership that underpin excellent early education and care.

Just as for schools and colleges, my ambition is that all early years settings should be at least 'good' and I know that this ambition is shared by everyone across the sectors.

Sir Michael Wilshaw  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

## Executive summary

The centrality of the early years in achieving our children's future success is universally accepted. If, as a society, we are committed to closing the attainment gap, then closing it at an early stage is the priority.

We know that good and outstanding settings make a stronger and more positive difference to children's learning and development than those that are not yet good. In this survey we identify common factors that contribute to the success of the best. Excellent early education and care are underpinned by strong leadership; this is what counts most and makes the greatest difference.

Effective leaders have a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve. They are absolutely determined to 'get it right first time' and to give children in their settings the very best start. They have high expectations of children and adults alike; this is a hallmark of their work. They are highly qualified and experienced, with very good knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They know exactly what good and outstanding teaching looks like and how much young children are capable of achieving, and they also understand how children learn best. They know what they need to do to bring about improvement and they communicate convincingly, leading by example. They expect and encourage staff to be fully involved in the setting and they move at the right pace to keep them engaged.

Strong leaders identify accurately what works and what needs to change. They never lose sight of the link between the quality of the provision and its impact on children's learning and development. They involve staff, parents and children in the process of self-evaluation and they welcome challenge from other professionals.

Effective leaders build teams of well-qualified and skilled practitioners who see themselves as educators. They put regular, rigorous performance management in place, and they hold staff to account for the quality of their teaching and children's progress. They ensure that their staff receive the right professional development and training at the right time and that they seek out, and share, good practice locally, nationally and, occasionally, internationally. What sets these leaders apart is that they are not afraid to challenge poor performance and are prepared to lose staff who are unwilling or unable to improve.

Developing a strong and well-qualified staff team involves significant investment of time, energy and resources. The best leaders don't baulk at this because, for the young children involved, this investment reaps huge dividends, now and into the future.

## Introduction

Since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage the proportion of good or better providers has risen from 64% in 2008 to 74% in 2012, with year-on-year improvements in children's attainment as evidenced by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores. In 2008, 49% of children reached a good level of development; this rose to 64% in 2012. Many providers across all types of early years settings are supporting children's learning well.

However, this masks the fact that two fifths of all early years settings are not improving fast enough to give children the best start in life, including the skills they need to be ready for school. Satisfactory provision is not effective enough to close the attainment gap sufficiently quickly.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, too few children start school with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make the most of the next stage of their education. Children from poorer families achieve less well than their peers. In 2012, just over a third of children were not working securely in communication, language and literacy, as shown by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores and, in deprived areas, this rose to more than four in 10 children.<sup>2</sup>

This report describes features of strong leadership and ways in which leaders, determined to 'get it right first time' for children, have developed and sustained high-quality provision. It provides examples of good practice for settings that are not improving quickly enough and for those that want to build on their current strengths. Case studies of some of the providers can be found on Ofsted's good practice website at: [www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk).

## What makes a setting good or outstanding?

### Strong leadership is key

1. Strong and effective leadership makes a setting good or outstanding. It drives up the quality of a setting's work and ensures that all children are helped to reach their potential. It is no surprise that strong leaders share common features.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills: Early Years* (120349), Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120349](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120349); and the First Annual Early Years Lecture: December 2012, Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/earlyyears2012](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/earlyyears2012).

<sup>2</sup> Early Years Foundation Stage profile results in England, DfE, 2011/2012; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012).

## **Strong leaders have high expectations**

2. The leaders in the settings visited shared a strong sense of purpose: they were intent on giving children the best start. All the leaders had high aspirations for children's achievement, irrespective of their circumstances or starting points. Leaders' expectations of their staff's performance and the quality of the teaching were equally high.<sup>3</sup>

## **Strong leaders take steps to ensure they are well qualified and experienced**

3. The leaders in the survey had achieved a strong combination of relevant qualifications, accredited training and relevant experience.<sup>4</sup> This gave them the detailed knowledge they needed to understand precisely what good and outstanding teaching looks like and how children learn best. Our findings corroborate those of Professor Cathy Nutbrown whose review emphasises the need for leaders to be experts in their field.<sup>5</sup> Nine of the 11 leaders had at least five years' experience of leadership and, of these leaders, five had 10 or more years. Eight of the 11 leaders were qualified to degree level; four held Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and two held Early Years Professional Status (EYPS).<sup>6</sup> This proportion is much higher than the national picture, where just 11% of settings have staff qualified to this level.

## **Strong leaders communicate effectively and lead by example**

4. The leaders we met through the survey were persuasive, passionate communicators who inspired their staff. They were explicit about what they wanted to see and why. Their knowledge and expertise meant that they could explain to staff why certain strategies work and why others do not. They could lead by example, demonstrate effective teaching and explain clearly how the strategies they were using supported children's learning, development and progress.<sup>7</sup>

## **Strong leaders make the right changes possible**

5. The challenges the leaders faced in the settings we visited could not be underestimated. Eight of the 10 group day care and nursery providers

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report the term 'teaching' is used to describe adults' interactions with children.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'leader' is used to describe on-site leadership and management.

<sup>5</sup> *Foundations for quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications* (the Nutbrown Review), DfE, 2012; [www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview](http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview).

<sup>6</sup> The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework defines Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) as full and relevant qualifications at level 6.

<sup>7</sup> This reflects the Nutbrown Review's findings that good leaders 'know how to develop children's interests and plan to extend their learning and apply this expertise in everyday practice' and 'the more time a graduate leader spends working directly with children, the greater the impact they have on those children'.

successfully overcame historic problems such as low levels of staff knowledge and a lack of understanding about what good practice means. Their staff often had low levels of qualification and were sometimes resistant to change. The leaders needed to persevere and invest time and effort – but the investment was worth it. They prioritised what needed to be done, focusing first on the things that would make most difference to children’s learning. They introduced new ways of working gradually, in ways that secured the agreement of staff, and they gave new initiatives and changes time to become firmly established.

6. These leaders created learning communities in which ideas and suggestions for improvement were encouraged and expected. Staff felt safe to question existing practice, suggest alternatives, try new things and learn from mistakes.

## **How do leaders and staff bring about positive change?**

### **Strong leaders identify strengths and weaknesses of the setting’s work**

7. The leaders we met were honest about the strengths and weaknesses in their settings but they were also successful in translating their vision into reality. They never lost sight of the direct link between the quality of teaching and children’s learning, development and progress. They always focused on what could be expected of children at different ages and stages of development, and on their progress. Three of the leaders used commercial schemes to assess children’s levels of well-being and engagement. These provided an additional perspective on how well the teaching and resources engaged children’s interests and developed their concentration and perseverance.
8. These leaders were clear that self-evaluation was not something that managers did in isolation. They emphasised the importance of individual staff reflecting on their own practice. Staff were routinely expected to ask themselves:
  - What is it like for a child here?
  - What difference are we making, and how do we know?

This became part of a self-improvement cycle of observation, reflection, improvement, further observation and evaluation.

9. Despite the cost and organisational implications, these leaders created opportunities for their staff to reflect on the quality and impact of their provision and practice. The strategies they used included making sure that:
  - frequent, formal team meetings focused specifically on how they and the staff could improve the quality of learning and teaching
  - staff had time to record their reflections in their own learning journals
  - time was scheduled weekly for staff to reflect on the impact of their work while evaluating what children were learning and their stages of



development; two larger day-care settings created time for this during the day by alternating the members of staff who led whole-group activities

- staff had research opportunities to examine particular aspects of practice in more detail, sometimes supported by external consultants
- staff discussed their practice in meetings between key workers and staff, performance management discussions and professional development sessions, so that this became part of the setting's culture.

10. These leaders strengthened their setting's self-evaluation by involving and taking account of the views of children and parents as well as staff, as exemplified here.

The childminder in the survey included 'What if...?' situations in her self-evaluation. She looked at her work from the children's perspective, tested new ideas and used her analysis to modify her personal development plan. She also took into account regular feedback from parents through questionnaires, daily diaries, informal conversations, texts and emails.

Children in a private setting were involved in self-evaluation and decision-making through a children's committee. It met every six weeks to capture children's views on what was working and what could be improved. Children attending 'tea club' at the end of each afternoon evaluated the day's events and activities informally. Exit interviews were undertaken with leavers and the information was used to inform the setting's self-evaluation.

### **Strong leaders seek external challenge**

11. Strong leaders welcome challenge and advice. In 10 of the 11 settings visited, leaders valued and sought external scrutiny of their practice from advisers, from network or cluster co-ordinators, from informal partnerships with other strong schools, settings and children's centres, and through quality assurance schemes. These partners acted as critical friends who provided objective, external challenge and support. This was particularly appreciated by settings with no formal governance arrangements.
12. Settings that were accountable to a governing body, either because they were part of a school or linked to a children's centre, were challenged and supported regularly in equal measure. The leaders of four of the settings visited said that the challenge and support they had received from their governing bodies had contributed to their setting's success.

## How do leaders build an effective team?

### Strong leaders ensure they have a well-qualified workforce

13. Research and inspection evidence show that the higher the qualification level, the better the quality of provision.<sup>8</sup> The best settings have highly qualified practitioners. Leaders we met in the survey were adamant that the teaching and practice of every member of staff should be rooted in a secure knowledge of how young children learn best.

Staff development in a private nursery, before it moved in 2006 into premises within a school, had not been a priority. The nursery leader said:

'At the time, most of my staff were parents who wanted something "easy" to do to fill their time and get them out of the house. Staff confidence was low and they did not view themselves as educators of children or look at how their practice made a difference to children's learning. Having a staff team with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of early childhood development is crucial if a setting is to improve the quality of its provision.'

To achieve this she established roles for staff that were linked to their existing qualifications and clear routes to help them to improve these. Staff training needs were accurately identified through various methods, including half-termly observations of individuals, as well as formal and informal supervision sessions. Regular appraisals took account of what individuals saw as their strengths and areas for development.

The manager was developing a strong team because she expected each person to take responsibility for improving their level of qualifications. She used accredited training to raise qualification levels and to improve practice and outcomes for children. The staff were expected to keep up to date by making the most of training and development opportunities, for example briefings available through the local school on topics such as autism.

The manager demonstrated her own commitment to professional development by graduating with a BA in Early Childhood Studies; she also gained Early Years Professional status. She received strong mentoring and support from the Reception class teacher and confirmed that this, together with 'the skills and knowledge I acquired through my studies, enabled me to better understand and evaluate the impact of what I was doing on the children's learning'. This has helped her to improve the level of this reflective practice within the whole staff team. As a result,

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<sup>8</sup> *Foundations for Quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications* (the Nutbrown Review), DfE, 2012; [www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview](http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview).

assessment is more precise and staff are able to identify children who need additional input. Crucially, staff now organise one-to-one or small group catch-up sessions to ensure that no child is left behind.

14. Of the settings visited, five employed at least one teacher; a further two had regular access to or input from one. Six employed at least one Early Years Professional, and another had done so in the recent past. In five of these settings, the Early Years Professionals also had relevant degrees in early years studies.

### **Strong leaders take the necessary steps to improve the quality of teaching**

15. The leaders who took part in the survey were clear that, although many interlinked factors influence children's achievement, the quality of adults' interaction with children has the greatest impact on learning.
16. These leaders were clear about which aspects of teaching needed improvement. Commonly, they needed to ensure that staff were:
- prioritising children's communication and language skills, personal, social and emotional development, mathematics and early literacy, and working with parents to help them support their children's development in these areas
  - planning activities based on regular, accurate assessments of children's learning, knowledge and skills, and adjusting activities to meet the needs of individual children and groups who were most at risk of falling behind
  - routinely planning and making the most of structured teaching opportunities each day
  - taking every opportunity when children were initiating their own play to extend children's learning, develop their language, feed in new vocabulary and challenge their thinking
  - developing high-quality questioning skills
  - emphasising the importance of listening carefully to children and thinking about the best time to intervene rather than just jumping in.
17. These leaders had used a range of approaches to improve the quality of teaching. As a result they were:
- maintaining a strong focus, in planning activities, on what they wanted the children to learn to ensure that staff thought about the quality of their input
  - checking the accuracy of staff's assessments regularly to ensure that activities were matched well to learning needs and children's progress was tracked precisely (effective network coordinators and local authority advisers make these checks with childminders)

- seeking and sharing assessment information about children’s progress with parents frequently, so that staff and parents could work together to help children to achieve as much as they could
- demonstrating good teaching themselves, or using experienced staff to show new staff and students what was expected. They also developed specific skills such as effective questioning to help children develop and explain their thinking. Their successful modelling of good teaching was enhanced by their ability to explain the theories behind their practice
- adopting proven initiatives or schemes such as Every Child a Talker<sup>9</sup> or I CAN<sup>10</sup> principles to enhance children’s speech and language and to improve the quality of adult–child interactions
- tackling misunderstandings swiftly and using discussion, training and support to help staff to understand good practice
- encouraging staff to deepen their professional knowledge through active membership of national early years organisations and professional associations.

### **Strong leaders hold staff to account**

18. The leaders in the survey built strong teams by developing a shared sense of responsibility for improvement. They developed a ‘no excuses’ culture where individuals understood their responsibility for the quality of their own practice and its impact on children’s achievement.
19. In the settings visited, a golden thread of accountability ran from the setting’s priorities for improvement through to targets for individual members of staff. During individual, key worker and team meetings, staff were held to account for their contribution to improvements in the setting and for the progress of the children in their groups.

Leaders in a maintained nursery school used data about children’s learning and development during performance management discussions. They challenged staff’s expectations about what children could learn and discussed what might be holding the children back from achieving as much as they could. These discussions helped staff to think about what they could do better and to know precisely where they might give children additional support.

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<sup>9</sup> *Every child a talker: guidance for early language lead practitioners*, DCSF, 2008. For further information, see: [www.foundationyears.org.uk/2011/10/every-child-a-talker-guidance-for-early-language-lead-practitioners/](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/2011/10/every-child-a-talker-guidance-for-early-language-lead-practitioners/)

<sup>10</sup> I CAN is a children’s communication charity that offers a range of support, advice, guidance and training to parents and practitioners. It also runs two specialist schools and offers multi-disciplinary assessments and accredited workforce training. For further information, see: [www.ican.org.uk/](http://www.ican.org.uk/)

20. In eight of the 11 settings visited, monitoring and evaluation included regular formal observations of teaching and its impact on children's learning. All eight of the settings were schools or had strong links with schools or children's centres, or had regular contact with a qualified early years teacher.

Leaders and staff in a private nursery observe sessions in the Reception and Year 1 classes of the adjacent school, while the headteacher makes formal observations in the nursery of both the leader's and the staff's teaching.

21. Feedback from in-house and external observations gave clear pointers about how to improve and was crucial to developing teaching and learning. Leaders who focused their observations on specific topics, such as phonics or mathematical development, found this improved these areas of learning.

The leader in one private setting regularly films staff teaching and uses the recordings with individual staff to analyse their practice. This has improved interactions. For example, the practitioners support for children's speech and language development has improved because they have had opportunities to review and reflect on the detail and impact of their teaching.

22. In the pre-schools visited, leaders who worked regularly alongside staff used daily, informal opportunities to observe practice. This led to regular, constructive feedback about the quality of teaching and its impact on children's learning. Childminders who were members of networks valued highly the feedback from a network coordinator as a source of external support and challenge.<sup>11</sup>
23. These leaders always tackled poor performance. They were not afraid to challenge staff's attitudes and ways of working. Four leaders in this survey specifically identified that shifting the attitudes of staff who were resistant to change was fundamental in bringing about improvement. Leaders who found that, following support, staff would not or could not improve or were not willing to work hard to ensure children received the best teaching were prepared to tackle this.

### **Strong leaders make sure their staff have access to continuing training and professional development**

24. Our leaders ensured that their staff became excellent educators as well as carers. This was particularly pertinent given the high levels of staff turnover in

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<sup>11</sup> Ofsted's good practice website includes examples of highly effective childminder networks in Diss and Maden Valley that make a significant contribution to the quality of childminding. See: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120312](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120312) and [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130025](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130025).

the sector and the relatively young age-profile of early years staff, many of whom enter the workforce with limited skills and experience.

25. The leaders invested time in finding out about the skills, knowledge, expertise and understanding of their staff and made sure that opportunities for training and development were closely aligned to the specific needs of the individual, the team and the current cohort of children.
26. The leaders recognised that different types of training are essential. They provided generic training during induction and for staff taking on new roles. For example, one of the settings ensured that all new staff received training on the role of the adult in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that staff understood the importance of getting to know the children really well: listening, responding and knowing when to intervene in children's learning and play.
27. The leaders also held regular reviews of staff practice. They carried out formal observations of staff when they were working and used these observations to identify the training and development that individuals needed. Staff were expected to take responsibility for the quality of their own practice and to look for opportunities for professional development. They met this expectation within a culture of mutual support and challenge.
28. These leaders ensured that the needs of staff were assessed accurately. They knew how to develop individuals who, to begin with, had good nurturing skills but whose teaching was weak and who were poorly qualified. Sometimes, leaders' analysis of training and development needs differed from the perceptions of their staff, but their commitment to tackling weak performance and putting children's needs first was unshakeable.
29. Leaders found group and joint training, sometimes with external trainers, often on-site, to be the most effective because it could be customised to the specific needs of the adults and children. They said it maximised attendance and, most importantly, stimulated group discussion and reflection. Leaders in our survey provided examples of opportunities for good-quality professional development and training.

Staff in a private nursery join the in-service training of the adjacent school, have access to local authority training and receive bespoke in-house training, designed by the manager. These include briefings, such as on the latest research on the development of children's brains, and the Reggio Emilia and Te Whariki approaches to early years practice and theory. The manager sources relevant reading and film clips for staff and these are posted on the setting's internet site.

The headteacher of a nursery school says that the training that has improved practice the most was about assessing children's learning. This training came about from meetings with a cluster of local primary and

secondary schools. The headteacher actively encourages staff to conduct action research in the setting, supported by external consultants.

In another nursery school, staff attend national research conferences and share what they learn with the team, using this to inform discussions about ways of improving their work.

In a third nursery, the whole staff team is engaged in training and development, with clear systems for sharing knowledge and understanding. Individual targets are linked to personal and school priorities. For example, the setting is supporting a member of staff to gain a master's level qualification in special educational needs because this will benefit both the individual and the organisation.

In a committee-run setting, five members of staff were inspired to follow the leader's example and successfully gained degrees in Early Childhood Studies. This took great personal commitment and also needed the support of the manager and the committee.

## How do settings share good practice?

### Strong leaders learn from the best

30. The leaders visited understood the importance of learning from and sharing good practice. They knew why staff must both give and receive support if they are to continue to perform at the highest level. The leaders of eight of the 11 settings visited had organised visits to highly successful early years settings in order to share practice with and receive feedback from other experienced professionals. The visits were focused firmly on observations of the quality of teaching and its impact on children's learning and development. They refreshed the team's awareness of what good and outstanding practice looks like.
31. Occasionally, visits were made to settings much further afield. Staff in one nursery school, for example, learned about children's creativity and how to harness this by studying what has been achieved at Reggio Emilia in Italy. Staff from the setting also studied how to make the most of opportunities for children's learning outside by visiting examples of Forest School provision in Denmark and a nature kindergarten in Scotland.
32. Securing sponsorship or grants and gathering sufficient funding to pay for visits such as these takes time and energy; sometimes visits closer to home can have just as much impact. The very best settings and their energetic leaders show ingenuity in finding ways to see great provision: they know the benefits are huge and make a difference to the educational programme that is offered, the quality of teaching and children's achievement. As one leader said: 'You have to invest in people so that they are willing to learn, to adapt, to become more reflective and, ultimately, to raise their game.'

33. Here are some examples of ways in which settings have sought to learn from and share good practice.

A maintained nursery school seeks partnerships which 'challenge us to question our practice and provision'. It does this by:

- making links with other outstanding nursery schools
- carrying out paired observations of the quality of teaching in their setting with a headteacher from another outstanding school
- meeting other nursery school headteachers across the north of England specifically to discuss improvement strategies and ways of strengthening their practice
- encouraging and enabling staff to attend local meetings of national organisations where thinking is challenged and staff are encouraged to reflect on their teaching and care
- developing links with a local school-centred initial teacher training programme (SCITT) which encourages reciprocal visits across schools.

Staff in a private setting on a school site benefit from visits to and from school staff. They share systems for training, monitoring and evaluation and ways of working. They find out what works – and what doesn't – and pass on what they have learnt. They use half-termly meetings with school staff to make sure that they are aware of and able to contribute to different initiatives, such as approaches to the teaching of phonics.

In another setting, the manager realised that some staff thought Reggio Emilia was a person not an approach. She tackled the mistake promptly by using the staff website to share a virtual tour of a Reggio setting with staff. This clarified the misunderstanding and also led to some of the ideas being adopted into nursery practice.

The childminder in our survey found the coordinator's network meetings and monitoring visits to be a good source of support and challenge. She organised a visit to another highly effective childminder specifically to observe practice.

## How do the best settings work with parents and carers?

### **Strong leaders – and staff – understand the importance of establishing good relationships with parents and of involving them in their children's learning**

34. The leaders in this survey recognised that strong partnerships with parents and carers help to provide the best start for children. They found that they were able to involve some parents from the first point of contact in their children's learning and development. With other parents, it was necessary first to build and nurture relationships, to draw them in through social events or on-site



visits to meet health professionals and then, gradually, to focus discussions on their children's learning, development and progress.<sup>12</sup>.

35. Examples of good partnership working seen during the survey visits included the following.

Staff in five settings use the initial home visits to start the process of involving parents in their child's learning and development by assessing what children can already do, know and understand. In another three settings, through the local children's centre, staff start to get to know parents and build productive relationships before enrolment in the nursery.

Eight leaders routinely share information about children's learning and progress through regular, scheduled reviews where they discuss assessments and look at children's work together. These include meetings based around the progress check for two-year-olds.<sup>13</sup>

Our survey settings use regular drop-in days, open evenings and formal parents' evenings or curriculum meetings to share information about children's progress and achievement and to identify why children might not be making enough progress. They help parents to make good any gaps in their child's learning and development, promoting key areas of learning in particular.

They also provide workshops and drop-ins for parents on topics such as story-telling. They help them to find ways of supporting their children, focusing especially on ways of encouraging their child's emerging mathematical or early writing skills. One setting runs sessions in which a speech and language therapist shares I CAN principles with parents and helps them to support their child's communication and language skills.

Another setting invites the parents of children they have concerns about to work with the teacher at the Children's Centre to plan an educational programme that best meets their child's needs. The staff support parents with arrangements for transition when the children move from the Children's Centre into private day care, or from day care into school.

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<sup>12</sup> This mirrors research which shows that children from poor backgrounds are much less likely to experience a rich home learning environment than children from better-off backgrounds. Pre-school programmes can help parents and carers to improve their parenting skills and the quality of the home learning environment so that children are better prepared for school. See *Unseen children: access and achievement – evidence report*, Ofsted (130155), June 2013; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/accessandachievement](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/accessandachievement).

<sup>13</sup> The progress check at two years is a statutory requirement of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (September 2012). It aims to give parents a short written summary of their child's development in the prime areas of learning and development in the EYFS which reflects their strengths and areas for development, and identifies development needs earlier.

Other settings use their own website to share curriculum plans. The leader of one private setting provides parents with protected access to online information about their child's development. Staff also use discussions and displays to show parents ways of supporting their child's learning at home. They provide lending libraries of books and equipment such as home-learning bags with items such as scissors, play dough and other materials. They also provide guidance for parents so that they can continue with activities at home to support learning.

## Notes

In January 2013, inspectors held two focus groups. One represented national early years organisations; the other represented providers whose overall effectiveness had been judged to be good or outstanding for more than one inspection.

In February 2013, inspectors visited 11 settings that serve communities across the socio-economic spectrum: three maintained nursery schools, a childminder and seven providers of childcare on non-domestic premises. The overall effectiveness of all the 11 providers had been judged to be good or outstanding for at least two consecutive inspections.

Inspectors also took into account Ofsted's wider inspection evidence, case studies of good practice, and national and international research.

Case studies of some of the providers can be found on Ofsted's good practice website at: [www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk).

## Further information

### Publications by Ofsted

First Annual Early Years Lecture: 3 December 2012, Ofsted, 2012;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/earlyyears2012](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/earlyyears2012)

*Getting to good: how headteachers achieve success* (120167), Ofsted, 2012;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120167](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120167).

*The impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (100231), Ofsted, 2011;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231).

*The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills: Early Years* (120349), Ofsted, 2012;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120349](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120349).

*The special educational needs and disability review: a statement is not enough* (090221), Ofsted, 2010;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090221](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090221).

### Other publications

*Childcare and early years providers survey: 2011*, DfE, 2012;  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2011](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2011).

Sylva, K. et al., *The effective provision of pre-school education project (EPPE): findings from the pre-school period*, Research Brief No. RBX15-03, DfES Publications, 2003; <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe/eppefindings.htm>.

*Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*, DfE, 2012;  
[www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/development-matters](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/development-matters).

Early Years Foundation Stage profile results in England, DfE. 2011/2012;  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-in-england-academic-year-2011-to-2012).

*First steps: a new approach for our schools*, CBI, 2012;  
[www.cbi.org.uk/campaigns/education-campaign-ambition-for-all/first-steps-read-the-report-online](http://www.cbi.org.uk/campaigns/education-campaign-ambition-for-all/first-steps-read-the-report-online).

*Foundations for quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications* (the Nutbrown Review), DfE, 2012;  
[www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview](http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview).

## Annex

### Providers visited

| Provider                                     | Location      |
|--|---------------|
| Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre | Reading       |
| Boldon Nursery School                        | Tyne and Wear |
| Childminder                                  | Reading       |
| Garstang Pre-school Nursery                  | Lancashire    |
| Highters Heath Nursery School                | Birmingham    |
| Newstead Children's Centre                   | London        |
| Our Lady Star of the Sea Nursery             | Lancashire    |
| Southwater Village Hall Pre-school           | West Sussex   |
| Spicey Gill Pre-school                       | Yorkshire     |
| Wheatley Hill Community Nursery              | Durham        |
| Witton Gilbert Nursery                       | Durham        |

### Organisations and settings represented at focus groups

4Children  
 Early Education  
 Holmewood Nursery Schools  
 I CAN  
 McMillan Early Childhood Centre  
 Miss Delaney's Too Nursery School  
 National Children's Bureau  
 National Day Nurseries Association  
 Pre-school Learning Alliance  
 Treehouse Children's Centres  
 Triangle Nursery School