

# Ofsted 'busts myths' as inspections go in-house <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Ofsted has launched a myth-busting campaign for the early years sector to coincide with moving all early years inspections and their management in-house.

This means that, from 3 April, all early years inspectors will be employed directly by, or have contracts with, Ofsted. Third-party organisations such as Prospects and Tribal previously carried out most inspections on the inspectorate's behalf.

The online myth-busting document follows a similar format to one that Ofsted has been using for schools.

It is a working document that will be updated on an ongoing basis and has been drafted to clarify issues raised by inspectors and the sector, and following input from providers to last year's Government review of the childcare sector, Cutting Red Tape.

Ofsted said its aim is to make the inspections process as simple to understand as possible and correct common misconceptions. The document should be read in conjunction with the Early years inspection handbook.

### Moving in-house

Ending the use of third parties gives Ofsted full control over the selection, training and management of early years inspectors, bringing the sector in line with schools and further education colleges.

Ofsted has also said that bringing the process in-house will give it complete oversight of the quality of inspection.

The contracts for Tribal and Prospects ended in March. In 2015, Ofsted renewed their contracts for two more years. However, it had already brought the inspection of 'requires improvement' early years settings in-house.

Ofsted told Nursery World that 138 early years inspectors previously employed by Tribal and Prospects will now be directly employed by Ofsted. In addition, there are 270 early years inspectors contracted to Ofsted; for example, people in the sector who do some inspection work but it is not their main job.

Ofsted confirmed they are all undergoing induction and training specifically to work as early years inspectors. Asked if it was costing more to bring inspections in-house, a spokesperson said no.

The move to bring early years inspectors in-house has been warmly welcomed across the sector by early years providers, organisations, and members of the Ofsted Big Conversation (OBC), a campaign group launched in 2013 in response to mounting concerns about early years inspection.

Jennie Johnson, chief executive of nursery group Kids Allowed and organiser of the North West OBC, said, 'We are delighted inspection is coming back in-house. It can only aid quality and consistency issues by having the professional development of the inspectors as the direct responsibility of Ofsted.

'Removing an unnecessary link in an already complicated chain can only be a good thing. It also removes what we believed were perverse unintended consequences of the original contract between Ofsted and its third parties.'

In addition to making the myth-busting campaign available via social media, Ofsted has a new Childcare Registration Facebook page to encourage new childminders to register.

### Early years inspections: myths

'Ofsted has produced this document to confirm the facts about our early years inspections and to dispel those myths that can sometimes result in unnecessary workloads for registered child carers. It should be read alongside the Early years inspection handbook.

'Our aim is to expose misconceptions and highlight specific practices that are not required by Ofsted, so that we can make the inspection process as clear and straightforward

as possible.

'The purpose of Ofsted's early years inspections is to make sure that registered child carers are providing a good quality of care and education, as required by the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

'Inspection plays an important role in helping parents to make informed choices about the type of care available for their child, and advising parents and carers about the quality of care young children are receiving.

'Inspections are not designed to catch staff off guard, nor do inspectors prepare a list of trick questions to ask providers. Inspectors are qualified professionals, trained to evaluate the quality of an early years setting, highlighting both good practice and areas for improvement.'

The myths, published online at gov.uk, include:

Notice period prior to inspections

Myth: Ofsted cannot carry out inspections without any notice.

Fact: Ofsted can carry out inspections without notice. No-notice inspections normally, but not exclusively, take place when someone has raised concerns about a setting.

Paperwork

Myth: Ofsted wants to see as much paperwork as possible. Paperwork should be stored in a folder marked 'Ofsted'.

Fact: Ofsted does not want to see a particular amount or type of paperwork during an inspection. Settings should use whatever approach to paperwork that suits them and are free to file it however they like. Each inspection is unique and inspectors will only ask to see evidence they consider appropriate to that individual setting, usually determined by their observations of teaching and learning. The paperwork most often requested is listed on pages 10 and 11 of the Early years inspection handbook, but it is unlikely that an inspector will want to see all of these documents at every inspection.

Myth: Ofsted prefers to see paper assessments of children's learning and development rather than those recorded electronically. Providers must keep a learning journey for each child.

Fact: There is no prescribed way of conducting or recording assessments, as long as it is an effective process that helps children's learning, development and progress.

Myth: Ofsted expects leaders to complete a written self-evaluation form (SEF).

Fact: Childcare providers do not need to produce a self-evaluation form, but managers and staff should be able to discuss their evaluation of the setting with the inspector. Inspectors will ask staff about the quality of care and activities they provide, and how well the setting is meeting the learning needs of all children.

During inspection

Myth: During an inspection, Ofsted expects the manager to be available at all times to speak with the inspector.

Fact: Ofsted does not expect managers to be immediately available to speak with the inspector. Inspectors want to see settings operating as they would on any other day, and they will work around normal timetables. Meetings with managers will take place at a mutually convenient time during the inspection.

Myth: Ofsted inspectors may consider a cup of tea/coffee or biscuits as bribery. Or, they may expect a cup of tea/coffee even when a setting has a 'no hot drinks' policy.

Fact: Inspectors follow a strict code of conduct and all inspections are carried out without bias, regardless of any refreshments offered. Staff can offer inspectors hot drinks if that is their normal visitor protocol. If a setting has a 'no hot drinks' policy, inspectors will not expect the rules to be broken on their account.

Grading and feedback

Myth: Only managers can attend the feedback session at the end of an inspection.

Fact: It is not true that inspectors will only give feedback to managers. The feedback session is confidential until the final report is published, but other staff can be included where it is feasible.

Myth: Ofsted will never give a higher overall judgement than the grade a provider has awarded itself in its self-evaluation form (SEF).

Fact: Completing self-evaluation forms are not compulsory, but where they are made available, they will not determine Ofsted's overall judgement of the setting. With or without a SEF, inspectors will consider how well the setting understands what it is doing effectively, and how it can maintain or improve standards.

Myth: A childcare setting cannot achieve a judgement more than one grade above its previous inspection outcome.

Fact: A setting can improve by more than one grade. If Ofsted finds during the inspection that a setting has improved by more than one grade, the inspector will judge it accordingly.

Complaints

**Myth:** Making a complaint about an inspection will go against a childcare setting the next time it is inspected.

**Truth:** Ofsted does not take into account any past complaints lodged by a setting when making inspection judgements. Inspectors act fairly and without bias at all times, and their judgments are based solely on evidence. Inspection reports are also quality assured by other inspectors before they are finalised, to confirm that judgements are firmly supported by evidence.

#### Inspection changes

By Gill Jones, Ofsted Early Education deputy director

'It brings me great pleasure to write that as of today (3 April), Ofsted is directly scheduling all early years inspections and managing these services in-house.

'During this busy transition period, we've worked hard to make sure that our inspection and regulation services continue to run at the high standard you rightly expect. There will be minimal change to your interactions with us.

'I would like to remind you that we are updating the identification document our early years inspectors carry with them. From 18 April, inspectors will no longer carry the Inspector Authorisation and Identification booklet. Instead, they will carry a simple inspector ID card.

We're making this change to bring our early years work in line with our other remits – the new ID card is the same as those carried by our schools and social care inspectors.

'It is incredibly important to us that we continue working with the sector. It's in this spirit that I am delighted to announce the launch of our new myth-busting campaign for the early years sector. We want to make the inspection process as clear as possible and to banish some of the misconceptions around inspections that can create unnecessary workload and anxiety.

'Look out for this campaign on our social media channels. We'll be adding to this list of myths, so do let us know if you can think of any prevailing misconceptions you would like us to clear up.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** licensing <sup>[4]</sup>

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