

# Ofsted childcare ratings 'unreliable measure of quality'<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Ofsted grades are too broad to provide parents with accurate measures of childcare settings, a study for the Daycare Trust has found.

Researchers from the University of Oxford and A+ Education compared Ofsted inspections based on the Early Years Foundation Stage with other standardised assessment tools used in many countries, including the Early Childhood Environment Scale (ECERS) and the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) as well as quality assurance schemes.

The research, which was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, found that some settings judged as "outstanding" or "good" by Ofsted were rated as lower quality on the ECERS and ITERS rating scales.

The report recommended that decisions around quality, especially those that relate to funding and commissioning, should be made using a broad range of quality indicators, saying that currently many local authorities rely on Ofsted ratings to determine which nurseries and preschools receive government early years funding for free childcare provision.

Sandra Mathers, lead researcher from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford and Director of A+ Education, said: "We should not forget that Ofsted is a regulatory tool rather than a detailed quality measure. Our research suggests that Ofsted grades cannot necessarily be relied upon as complete measure of quality, and may need to be complemented by other measures.

"This has important implications for the way in which funding decisions around early education are made, and particularly the free entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds."

The researchers also conducted focus groups with parents, providers and local authorities. According to the report, many parents consulted felt that Ofsted reports did not provide all the information they needed to make a decision about a childcare setting.

An Ofsted spokeswoman said: "We agree with the report that a full picture of quality comes from consideration of a range of measures, including Ofsted inspections.

"This report is timely as it comes during our consultation on proposals for changes to inspection from September 2012. Those proposals already cover a number of issues raised in this report particularly about making reports easier to understand and more accessible to parents."

Anand Shukla, chief executive of the Daycare Trust, which has also published a guide for parents on how to identify high-quality childcare, said: "There is overwhelming evidence that investing in high-quality childcare in the formative years of a child's life can make the biggest difference to their life chances, but as this research proves parents are not currently equipped to make informed choices on quality.

"That is why Daycare Trust is calling on Ofsted to ensure its reports are accessible and useful to parents, and on local authorities to make more of the information they hold on childcare providers available to parents, to help them make choices based on quality."

The report also recommended that, where possible, decisions about quality should be made over time and include the knowledge of professionals rather than on a single "snapshot" assessment.

It calls for the government to support local authorities to use additional quality measures and tools, through adequate funding and statutory guidance, and that parents are provided with additional guidance to help them understand key aspects of early years practice and are provided with access to other means of identifying high-quality providers.

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**Region:** Europe<sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** quality<sup>[3]</sup>

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