

Improving quality in the early years: A comparison of perspectives and measures ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

[Full research brief in pdf](#) ^[2]

[Full report in pdf](#) ^[3]

[Presentation from the research team in pdf](#) ^[4]

Summary:

The research compared Ofsted inspections with other quality assessments such as ECERS (the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) and ITERS (the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale), as well as quality assurance schemes. Focus groups were also carried out with parents, providers and local authorities to explore how these different measures are understood and used.

Key findings and conclusions include:

- Ofsted grades are too broad to provide a detailed measure of quality in early years settings, and are best used alongside other quality measures
- Some settings judged as 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted were rated as lower quality on the ECERS and ITERS rating scales.

This has important implications for the way in which funding decisions around early education are made, particularly places for disadvantaged two year olds, as Ofsted ratings are currently used by many local authorities to determine which nurseries and preschools receive government early years funding for free places. It is also important because Ofsted reports are often the only information available to parents to support their childcare choice. The research shows that no single quality tool was able to provide a full picture of quality.

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 this research found that parents are not currently equipped to make informed choices on quality. The report recommends that Ofsted reforms its reports to ensure they are accessible and useful to parents, and that local authorities consider whether they could do more to make the information which they hold on providers available to parents, as recently recommended by the National Audit Office.

Related link: [Ofsted childcare ratings 'unreliable measure of quality'](#) ^[5]

Region: [Europe](#) ^[6]

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