

Handbook for inspections of Ofsted registered early years settings

Effective from November 2025

Last updated: 1
September 2026

Inspections are carried out under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, under the Children Act 1989 and the Childcare Act 2006

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Introduction

1. Proprietors must register provision with Ofsted that includes any children under the age of two. The registration details will reflect the Early Years Register which includes children from birth to five. ISI is approved to inspect early years registered settings, that are linked to association independent schools, on behalf of Ofsted.¹
2. When an early years setting, linked to an association independent school applies to register its provision, Ofsted inspectors complete a registration visit. If registration is approved, Ofsted will conduct the first inspection of the setting. If all evaluation areas are graded 'expected standard', 'strong standard' or 'exceptional' and safeguarding is 'met, subsequent inspections will usually be conducted by ISI.
3. It is common that a school which has a registered setting may also have older children in the early years as part of the school. For example, children in pre-school or Reception classes. This provision will usually be inspected as part of the school inspection.
4. Prior to inspection, inspectors will receive information from ISI about the ages of the children in the early years registered setting. However, where there is little separation of the registered setting and any non-registered school provision, inspectors will focus on inspection of the provision rather than on the age of children in the setting. This means inspections of registered early years settings may include provision for children up to and including four years of age.
5. If an inspector notices that a school has provision for children under two years of age which is not registered with Ofsted, they will report it to ISI immediately. If ISI inspects a school before Ofsted's initial inspection of the early years registered setting and there are concerns relating to children's safety in the non-registered provision, inspectors must report this to ISI. This information will be passed to Ofsted.
6. While the inspection of the early years registered setting usually takes place at the same time as the routine inspection of the school, it must be considered as a separate inspection completed on behalf of Ofsted.
7. An early years coordinating inspector will usually lead the inspection of the early years registered setting. An additional inspector will usually be deployed if there are 100 or more children on roll in the setting. Inspectors must attend mandatory training before undertaking inspections. This includes ISI training as well as relevant Ofsted training.
8. Inspections start at midday on the day following the notification call. The early years coordinating inspector and any additional early years inspectors will arrive at the same time as the main school inspection team and spend one day inspecting the registered early years provision. Inspectors of the registered provision will liaise with the main school inspection team to ensure the inspection is manageable for leaders and staff and to ensure that initial and feedback meetings are scheduled appropriately. All communications regarding the inspection will take place through the portal team room or in face-to-face meetings during the inspection.

¹ See Ofsted's additional guidance: [Regulating and inspecting association independent schools with an early years registration](#).

Inspection guidance and relevant supporting documents

9. The inspection of an Ofsted registered early years setting is conducted in accordance with the requirements of Ofsted's [Early years inspection toolkit](#). ISI inspectors must also use the most up-to-date copy of ISI's Handbook for inspections of Ofsted registered early years settings. This should be read in conjunction with ISI's [Framework](#) and [Handbook](#) for association school inspections and the [Early years foundation stage statutory framework](#) (also referred to as the EYFS requirements).
10. The inspection of the Ofsted early years registered setting leads to gradings on the quality of the provision in the following evaluation areas: safeguarding; inclusion; curriculum and teaching; achievement; behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines; children's welfare and wellbeing; leadership and governance.
11. Inspectors are not required to check that each of the requirements set out in the Early years foundation stage statutory framework are met. However, if in the course of collecting evidence, the inspector finds that a particular requirement is not met, they will take this into account when reaching gradings.

Inspection methodology and principles of inspection

12. ISI inspection methodology and principles apply to the inspection of early years registered settings. Inspectors will pay due regard to the principles of inspection methodology:
 - Manageability
 - Collaboration
 - Triangulation and typicality
 - Proportionality

Manageability

13. Inspectors must be mindful of the impact of inspections on the workload of staff in the registered setting and of senior leaders in the main school. They must be sensitive to this at all stages of the inspection. Inspection activities should not unduly disrupt the usual day-to-day running of the setting. The inspection plan should be flexible to take into account the context of the setting and the needs of the school.
14. Inspectors will regularly check on staff wellbeing. If a member of staff is undergoing exceptional stress during an inspection, they should let the early years coordinating inspector know as soon as possible. The early years coordinating inspector will take advice from a senior member of ISI staff about the situation. If staff do not feel able to speak to the early years coordinating inspector, they should telephone ISI on **0207 600 0100**, explain that their registered setting is currently being inspected and they are concerned for staff/their own wellbeing and ask to speak to a senior member of staff directly. The senior member of staff at ISI will listen carefully. ISI will advise on the most appropriate way forward. If possible, school staff should let someone at the school know about their concern. It may be appropriate to ensure the nominated individual is aware, so that support can be provided.
15. Inspectors will act with professionalism and sensitivity at all times, in line with the inspector code of conduct.

Collaboration

16. The early years coordinating inspector will meet with the leader/s of the early years registered setting at the start of the inspection to explain the inspection process. At the end of the onsite inspection, the early years coordinating inspector will provide inspection feedback to the leader/s of the registered setting and to the nominated individual or their representative.
17. The early years coordinating inspector will liaise regularly with the leader of the early years registered setting throughout the inspection, keeping them informed of emerging evidence and of any required amendments to the inspection plan. The early years coordinating inspector will provide leaders of the early years registered setting with the opportunity to signpost any additional evidence that may be relevant to the emerging evaluations.
18. The early years coordinating inspector will offer leaders of the early years registered setting the opportunity to be involved in some inspection activities, such as joint observations. Leaders will not be invited to join inspection activities when their presence could limit evidence gathering.

Triangulation and typicality of evidence

19. Triangulation is the process inspectors use to contextualise and test inspection evidence. Inspectors will look for connected sources of evidence, wherever these are available, to reach valid and reliable judgements. Inspectors will gather evidence from a wide range of sources. They will consider what they are seeing, reading and hearing; why it is important; how it relates to other evidence; and what further evidence they need to gather.
20. Inspectors will want to see the early years registered setting operating as it usually does, to evaluate what is typically experienced by children. Inspectors will confirm the typicality of what they are seeing, hearing and reading by considering connected evidence.
21. Inspectors will not expect, request or encourage leaders to reorganise the curriculum during inspections. Activities for children should go ahead as planned, including any off-site visits or pre-arranged visitors. The early years coordinating inspector will adapt their inspection plan to ensure they gather the necessary evidence.

Proportionality

22. When evaluating the effectiveness of the early years registered setting, inspectors will consider the evidence for each evaluation area, and they will exercise their professional judgement. Inspectors will ask themselves the following questions when gathering and considering evidence: What do I notice? Why does it matter? How does it fit? What more do I need to know?
23. Inspectors will take into consideration the scale and impact of any weaknesses. If inspectors consider that relative weaknesses do not amount to a breach of EYFS requirements, this will be reflected in the text of the inspection report and inspection gradings for the related evaluation area.
24. Where there are minor errors or a sequence of minor errors, inspectors will consider the following in order to consider the use of proportionality. The questions must be considered in the following order:
 - Is this a minor error?
 - Are knowledge and skills securely in place?
 - Is there strong evidence that this area is otherwise effectively implemented?

- Is this a systemic issue?
- Is the error fully rectifiable by the end of the inspection?

25. Inspectors will use this information to determine if the error or sequence of errors amounts to a failure to meet EYFS requirements.

Conduct

26. Inspectors must adhere to the ISI code of conduct. Inspectors are required to uphold the highest professional standards in relation to all who are involved in the process of inspection, before during and after the inspection.

27. Inspectors will:

- act in the best interests of children at the registered setting and prioritise the safeguarding and welfare of children at all times
- uphold ISI's values at all times and evaluate objectively in line with ISI's frameworks and regulatory requirements
- refrain at all times from any behaviour which might bring ISI into disrepute
- use their ISI inspector designation only in relation to their inspection work for ISI, unless previously agreed with ISI senior staff
- maintain up-to-date knowledge of ISI's inspection frameworks, handbook, policies and practice and associated regulatory requirements and guidance
- maintain strict confidentiality about the identity of the school to be inspected, the timing and scheduling of inspections and not divulge any information about the inspection (including but not limited to the region, the type of school or any identifying features) other than the fact they are going to be deployed at that time
- declare all actual and perceived conflicts of interest and have no real or perceived connection with the school and/or registered setting before or following inspection, which could undermine the integrity of the inspection
- act promptly and in line with ISI guidance on any safeguarding or health and safety issues that may arise on inspection
- work with professionalism, sensitivity and integrity, treating all with respect and courtesy
- liaise immediately with senior staff at ISI if inspectors become aware that school staff are experiencing exceptional stress
- follow requirements and good practice in relation to the secure management of information
- be mindful of the additional workload that inspection can create, be sensitive to the needs of staff and take reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and stress
- avoid any requests or suggestions that may cause undue disruption to business as usual for the registered setting
- communicate regularly and productively with the leaders of the registered setting keeping them informed of emerging findings clearly and honestly
- evaluate the work of the registered setting objectively and impartially supported by clear and secure evidence
- report fairly and without favour, ensuring that evaluations are reliable
- respect the confidentiality of inspection evidence and gradings
- wear their ISI inspector identification badge at all times when on the premises.

28. In order to facilitate a professional and positive working relationship, ISI expects that leaders and staff will:

- treat inspectors with professionalism, respect, courtesy and candour

- engage in an open and honest way with inspectors and work with them to facilitate the inspection process
- ensure any inspection surveys, or other communications with parents, staff and children requested by the early years coordinating inspector are sent out promptly
- provide access to evidence that will enable inspectors to evaluate the work of the registered setting fairly and reliably
- facilitate necessary meetings/discussions with the nominated individual or their representative, leaders, staff, parents and children
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption to the normal working day
- work with inspectors to minimise anxiety, stress or additional workload for staff
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on the premises
- maintain regular and productive communication with inspectors
- raise any concerns promptly with the early years coordinating inspector
- respect the confidentiality of information about the inspection and inspectors.

Pausing the inspection

29. If at any point, the early years coordinating inspector assesses that there is a need to pause an inspection activity due to matters relating to staff wellbeing or for any other reason, they must contact a senior member of ISI staff. Any pause in inspection will be noted in the evidence, including the reason for the pause.

Managing safeguarding concerns that arise on inspection

30. If inspectors hear or receive information which causes them concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child, they should act immediately to ensure the safety of the child in line with [ISI's policy](#). Inspectors will follow the registered setting's safeguarding and/or child protection policy. Concerns will normally be reported to the appropriate person within the setting for child protection procedures to be implemented according to the disclosure, concern or allegation made and external agencies will be informed directly if required.

The equality duty

31. Both inspectors and providers have responsibilities under the [Equality Act](#) 2010. Inspectors will consider whether providers are meeting their obligations under the Equality Act during inspection. The requirements of the Equality Act are incorporated within Early years inspection toolkit, which reflects providers' equality duties and guides inspectors in their evaluation of the provision and the extent to which providers meet the requirements of the Equality Act.

Preparing for the inspection

32. The early years coordinating inspector prepares for the inspection by gaining an overview of the setting, its context and history.
33. The early years coordinating inspector will:
- liaise with the delivery team at ISI to confirm the ages and numbers of children in the registered setting
 - analyse any information relating to the registered setting on the ISI portal and the [Ofsted: explore an area](#) tool
 - review previous inspection reports, recommended next steps/areas for actions and/or any concerns that ISI or Ofsted holds regarding the setting
 - scrutinise the school's and/or setting's website

- review any information that is reported in the press or online
- review publicly available data relating to the context of the local area, including levels of deprivation, take-up of the early years pupil premium (EYPP), obesity rates and oral health statistics to inform the discussion with leaders at the planning call
- establish any specific areas of focus and upload these on a pre-inspection activity form (IAF) on the portal.

Inspection notification

34. The initial contact with the school is made by a member of the ISI delivery team. The delivery team will explain that an inspection of the school's registered early years setting will be taking place at the same time as the routine inspection of the school. The ISI delivery team will email the school with confirmation of this. This email will also include as an attached document the list of the contextual information that the leader/s of the early years registered setting will need to have available to discuss with the early years coordinating inspector when they make the planning call later in the day. After the ISI delivery team has contacted the school, the reporting inspector who is leading the inspection of the linked school will contact the headteacher. During this call the reporting inspector will agree with the headteacher the arrangements for the early years coordinating inspector to contact the leader/s of the early years registered setting. The reporting inspector will then liaise with the early years coordinating inspector and confirm the arrangements for contacting the leader/s of the registered setting.

The initial call and planning call

Initial call to the leader of the registered setting

35. The early years coordinating inspector will contact the leader/s of the registered setting. The early years coordinating inspector will explain that there will be an initial call, followed by a planning call which will be held at a convenient time later on the same day.
36. The purpose of the initial call is for the early years coordinating inspector to:
- establish a constructive, professional dialogue between the inspector and the leader/s of the setting
 - explain the inspection that is taking place
 - confirm the details of the inspectors and check whether there are any concerns or conflicts of interest
 - explain if there will be a quality assurance monitor on the inspection
 - agree with the setting leader the time for the second, longer call (the planning call) and agree the arrangements for this
 - explain that the planning call will take approximately 30 minutes and what will be discussed on the call
 - refer leaders to the ISI Handbook for inspection of Ofsted registered settings and to the Ofsted [Early years inspection toolkit](#) to explain how the inspection will be organised and the possible gradings for the evaluation areas
 - request that leaders provide the following information ahead of the planning call to inform the discussion and planning of the inspection: the number of disadvantaged children, children who have SEND, those who are known or were previously known to children's social care and children who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Planning call

37. The early years coordinating inspector will call the leader of the registered early years setting at the time agreed in the initial call and explain that the call will be in three parts:

- introduction and discussing practicalities
- understanding the context of the setting
- discussing the inspection plan and inspection activities, including those which will be carried out in collaboration with the setting leader.

Introduction and discussing practicalities of the inspection

38. The early years coordinating inspector will:

- record the role/s of the setting's leaders who are on the call
- remind leaders of the code of conduct for inspections
- remind leaders of the importance of working openly, transparently and honestly with inspectors
- provide leaders with the telephone number of ISI's head office (**0207 600 0100**) to call if there are concerns about staff wellbeing
- check if any adaptations or reasonable adjustments need to be made
- ensure that leaders have the information they need and can access a copy of the inspection handbook
- ask if leaders have any requests that are specific to the setting's context
- ask leaders if they have any issues or concerns they wish to raise ahead of the inspection
- explain how and where inspectors may need to use their mobile phone during the inspection (for example to contact ISI, or to speak with parents).

Understanding the setting's context and leaders' priorities for improvement

39. The early years coordinating inspector will discuss with leaders:

- the setting's context, including any changes since the previous inspection
- relevant safeguarding issues identified by leaders, including any safeguarding concerns or allegations made about adults
- the information requested as part of the initial call to identify disadvantaged children, children who have SEND, those who are known or were previously known to children's social care and children who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. The early years coordinating inspector will explore with leaders how the setting supports these children, including how the setting works with external professionals and agencies to support children effectively.
- leaders' evaluation of what the setting is doing well, their successes and their priorities for improvement
- what leaders want all children to know and achieve as part of the setting's curriculum ambition.

Discussing the inspection plan

40. The early years coordinating inspector will consider and plan with leaders the inspection activities that will be carried out to gather the inspection evidence.

41. The inspection plan will include:

- review of records of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and other documents relating to the setting's safer recruitment procedures
 - checking the arrangements for paediatric first aid, safe sleeping, weaning and safer eating ensuring that the statutory requirements of the EYFS and related guidance are understood and implemented effectively
 - discussion with the practitioner designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding
 - discussion with the member of staff who coordinates the provision for children who have SEND
 - meetings with those responsible for the leadership of the setting, including relevant leaders with an inclusion role
 - arrangements for speaking with parents to gather their views
 - review of evidence about the funding the setting has received in relation to early years pupil premium (EYPP) and leaders' rationale for how this funding has been spent.
42. The early years coordinating inspector and school leaders will agree the children who will be included as part of case sampling at the start of the onsite inspection. The early years coordinating inspector may during the inspection identify other children who they will include in the case sampling as part of any emerging evidence. The early years coordinating inspector will ask leaders to identify children who:
- are disadvantaged (including those in receipt of EYPP)
 - have SEND
 - are known to or were previously known to children's social care
 - face other barriers to their learning and wellbeing.
43. Leaders will be invited to accompany inspectors on a range of inspection activities. This provides an opportunity for leaders to discuss the context of the setting further and exemplify the impact of their work. The early years coordinating inspector will explain that if leaders or managers are included in the child-to-adult ratios for the setting that this will be taken into account when planning the inspection activities so that leaders can be involved in reflective discussions at suitable times.
44. Inspection activities will include:
- shared observations of children with leaders
 - discussions with children
 - considering in detail the experience of children identified for case sampling
 - reflective discussions with leaders.
45. At the end of the first day, the early years coordinating inspector will meet with the setting leader/s to reflect on the evidence gathered so far. During this meeting, the early years coordinating inspector will discuss the emerging evidence with reference to the toolkit evaluation areas and focus on whether the expected standard is being met. The early years coordinating inspector will also explore with school leaders how the emerging evidence reflects leaders' own evaluation of the setting. The early years coordinating inspector will discuss with leaders at this stage the planning of additional inspection activities and their focus to explore further the experiences of children in relation to a particular evaluation area.
46. Additional inspection activities may include:
- focused leadership discussions
 - further shared observations
 - discussions with staff; further discussions with children

- further activities related to case sampling, such as discussions with parents and/or the key persons of the children selected.

47. The inspection plan should also include time for inspectors to write up their evidence.
48. Towards the end of the inspection, there will be a grading discussion with leaders. At this meeting the early years coordinating inspector will review with leaders the evaluation areas and evaluate the evidence gathered. Provisional final gradings will be determined on a 'secure fit' basis.

Gathering evidence

49. Through the inspection activities, the inspectors will learn as much as possible about the early years registered setting. They will evaluate its quality by triangulating and evaluating evidence, referring to the guidance and evaluation areas set out in the Ofsted [Early years inspection toolkit](#).
50. Inspectors will use their professional judgement when evaluating evidence and will ask themselves the following questions to inform their inspection activities:
- What do I notice?
 - Why does it matter?
 - How does it fit?
 - What more do I need to know?

Evaluating safeguarding

51. Inspectors will connect all the evidence gathered during the inspection to evaluate the effectiveness of the setting's safeguarding culture over time. To do this, inspectors will go beyond reviewing documents and will evaluate how safeguarding practice is embedded in the day-to-day work of the setting. Throughout inspection activities, inspectors will speak with staff and children where appropriate and observe how the setting models and maintains safe practice.
52. To evaluate safeguarding culture, inspectors will:
- meet with the practitioner who has designated responsibility for safeguarding children
 - probe and triangulate the information that is provided by the setting
 - take account of a range of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements over time
 - through sampling the experiences of children, review decisions made by the setting, any incidents that have occurred since the previous inspection, and whether the setting has taken appropriate action to deal with safeguarding concerns and to safeguard the children affected; consider the effectiveness of the setting's referral systems and its work with relevant professional agencies
 - review with the leader any allegations or concerns about adults and the steps the setting has taken in response to them
 - discuss how the setting manages processes in relation to safeguarding concerns or allegations about the leader; this may involve speaking with the nominated individual and/or the governing body
 - consider proportionately the views of children, parents and staff, using complaints or local intelligence
 - speak with staff and look for evidence of effective safeguarding training and practice and the impact of this on all children
 - examine how effectively the setting is implementing its safeguarding policies and processes, and how it keeps them up to date and under review

- check early in the inspection that recruitment is managed safely, ensuring that practitioners have the relevant checks and training required for their roles
- take into account Working together to safeguard children, the statutory guidance on safeguarding
- consider the impact of care practices on the setting's ability to safeguard babies and children.

53. Throughout the inspection the early years coordinating inspector will adapt these activities to the setting's context and will agree this with leaders where possible.

Observing children

54. Inspectors will observe as much as possible to gain an accurate picture of typical practice and to triangulate evidence to support relative strengths and/or relative weaknesses. Observations should be carried out in collaboration with leaders where possible. Observations may have an agreed focus, for example:

- a focus on inclusion
- a focus on children's welfare and wellbeing
- a focus on curriculum, teaching and achievement
- a focus on behaviour and routines
- a focus on leadership, for example so that leaders can demonstrate the impact of leaders' actions.

55. Inspectors will use a range of activities to understand children's typical experiences, including by engaging with children and observing them in the following contexts:

- both inside and outside the setting
- during mealtimes and sleep times
- at times of transition, such as at the start or end of the day.

56. Inspectors may play alongside or join children in an activity that encourages children to talk informally with the inspectors.

Case sampling

57. The early years coordinating inspector will make clear to leaders of the setting that they should not prepare any materials in advance of the inspection in regard to case sampling. This aligns with ISI's principle of manageability.

58. The sample should include children who have specific needs or who face particular barriers to learning. Case sampling must include a representative sample of children of different ages, including babies, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those who have SEND, those known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

59. During the inspection, inspectors will carry out activities that enables them to understand these children's experiences, the support they receive, and the progress they are making from their starting points.

60. Inspectors will observe these children in the setting and discuss with leaders what they intend these children to learn, based on what the children already know and can do.

61. Inspectors will gather evidence relating to:

- each key person's knowledge of each baby/child, how they decide what to teach them, and how they ensure their individual needs are met – this will include a focus on ensuring children's care needs and their learning and development
 - the progress check for children aged two
 - the impact of any additional funding for eligible children on their development, including the EYPP
 - the quality of support for children who have SEND, including the effective implementation of personal education plans and/or education, health and care (EHC) plans
 - how well children are learning and developing in readiness for their next stage of development and education, including school
 - whether children who are disadvantaged and those who have SEND are receiving their full entitlement to early education and the impact this has on them; if they are not receiving this, clearly explain why, and the impact on the children
 - the setting's values and policies and whether the day-to-day experiences of those most in need of support reflect these in practice.
62. Where possible, inspectors will speak with the parents of children who are part of the case sample. This will help inspectors evaluate how well the setting supports these parents to make sure their children take up their full entitlement to early education, claim any additional funding the children might be entitled to, and continue children's learning at home. Speaking with parents also helps inspectors evaluate how well the setting works with parents and professionals. Inspectors may also speak with any virtual school headteachers or their representatives who have responsibilities for looked-after children or previously looked-after children in the setting.
63. If leaders have not identified any children on roll who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or are known (or were previously known) to children's social care, inspectors will consider how well staff are supported and trained to be able to accurately identify these children's needs and to help them should there be any on roll in the future.

Engaging with parents

64. Inspectors may gather evidence from parents in person through informal discussions at the start and/or end of the day. In some circumstances the early years coordinating inspector may wish to telephone parents to seek their views.
65. Discussions with parents should take place without leaders or staff being present, other than in exceptional circumstances.

Engaging with leaders and practitioners

66. The early years coordinating inspector will offer leaders and staff the opportunity to be accompanied by a colleague. However, it is important that staff can express their views freely to inspectors.
67. Inspectors will discuss with practitioners:
- what children are learning from their curriculum activities and experiences
 - their assessment of what children know and can do and how they are building on it
 - what they understand about the early years curriculum and how they ensure the best possible outcomes for children
 - individual care routines for the youngest children
 - how well leaders support their wellbeing and professional development

- their experience of working at the setting
- the impact of leaders' actions
- the culture of safeguarding.

68. Inspectors will speak with the nominated individual and/or members of the school's governing body who are responsible for the oversight of the setting to discuss the leadership and governance of the setting and their roles and responsibilities in terms of oversight.

Keeping in touch meetings (KiT meetings)

69. The early years coordinating inspector will meet leaders during the inspection to reflect on the emerging evidence. The early years coordinating inspector will:
- check on leaders' and staff wellbeing and allow leaders to raise any issues or concerns, or seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection
 - evaluate to what extent the evidence supports a 'secure fit' in any of the evaluation areas, starting with the 'expected standard' for each evaluation area in the toolkit
 - consider which areas are emerging as strengths in the setting's work, and areas where they may have more to do. This will support the early years coordinating inspector and leaders to have a transparent dialogue about the emerging evidence and give leaders an opportunity to suggest further evidence, and help the early years coordinating inspector identify further areas to explore
 - let leaders know if there is emerging evidence that any evaluation area is likely to be graded as 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement', or if safeguarding is likely to be graded as 'not met'
 - identify the most appropriate inspection activities to gather further evidence required.
70. It may be necessary for the early years coordinating inspector to change planned activities to gather evidence across the evaluation areas by the end of the inspection. Early years coordinating inspectors will keep leaders informed of any changes that may be needed in the inspection plan.

Documentation

71. Inspectors will review documents to connect evidence and inform their evaluations. This may include reviewing safeguarding records and policies required by the Early years foundation stage statutory framework.
72. Inspectors may need to see policies and other relevant information, such as:
- referrals made to the local authority designated officer for safeguarding, and their resolution
 - details of all children who are an open case to social care/children's services and for whom there is a multi-agency plan
 - children present at the setting during the inspection (if not shown on the register)
 - records of accidents
 - records of any complaints and their resolution.
73. Providers should refer to the relevant EYFS requirements to check which documents they are required to have.
74. Settings may be asked to provide these documents during inspection. They should be able to provide access to them, either online or in printed form, during inspection. However, it is likely that the inspector will cover the matters relating to them during discussions with leaders of the setting.

Preferred method

75. When identifying strengths and weaknesses of practice, inspectors must focus on identifying what needs to improve. They should not use their own preferences of what they might like to see to advocate or advise a particular way to achieve a given aim.

Recording inspection evidence

76. Evidence will be recorded on a series of inspection activity forms (IAFs), which are completed during the onsite inspection, so they provide an accurate record and are not influenced by subsequent inspection activities. Inspectors must record the times of inspection activities using the context box on the IAF. Inspectors will evaluate their notes on each IAF in the purple boxes and also evaluate the evidence gathered in relation to any of the evaluation areas. These will be collated in an early years registered setting sectional summary, which will provide a reliable evidence base to inform the final feedback and the report.

Evaluating the early years registered setting

Inspector support

77. At any point during the inspection, if the early years coordinating inspector requires advice or support, particularly in relation to the gradings and/or identified strengths/relative weaknesses, they should contact a senior member of ISI staff, as agreed in advance of the inspection.
78. When the onsite inspection is complete and the feedback has been prepared, the early years coordinating inspector will call a senior member of ISI staff to discuss the provisional gradings before giving final feedback. This is an opportunity for moderation and to discuss the evidence that supports the gradings before feedback is given to the provider.
79. Inspections may be monitored for quality assurance purposes. The role of the monitor is to ensure that the inspection team adheres to ISI's inspection methodology and inspection principles. The monitor may ask questions for clarification during meetings with leaders and staff to assure themselves that appropriate evidence is considered by the inspection team. The monitor will support and challenge the inspection team to ensure that the evidence base is robust and supports the gradings reached by the team. Registered setting inspections may also be monitored by Ofsted, the regulator.

Grading discussion

80. Once inspectors have completed their evidence gathering at the end of day two, the early years coordinating inspector will invite leaders to a grading discussion, where the early years coordinating inspector will reflect with leaders on the evidence and advise them of the provisional grades.
81. The early years coordinating inspector will be very clear with leaders that any indicative gradings throughout the inspection are provisional. The final grading process will be carried out at the end of the inspection and will be subject to ISI's quality assurance processes.
82. The early years coordinating inspector must not give any impression that the inspection is complete and that final gradings have been made until the end of the inspection on day two at

which point it should be made clear that the onsite inspection has finished and no further evidence will be considered.

83. The early years coordinating inspector must use the guidance set out in the Ofsted [Early years inspection toolkit](#) to evaluate the setting and identify the individual gradings across each of the seven evaluation areas.
84. In some cases, it may be necessary to combine the grading discussion and the final feedback.
85. At the beginning of the grading discussion, the early years coordinating inspector will check on leaders' and staff wellbeing and allow leaders to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors.
86. For each evaluation area, the early years coordinating inspector will:
 - consider the additional evidence collected since the last KiT meeting with leaders
 - evaluate how this evidence builds on evidence gathered earlier in the inspection
 - evaluate the evidence to establish gradings for each evaluation area in the following order:
 - Safeguarding
 - Inclusion
 - Curriculum and teaching
 - Achievement
 - Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines
 - Children's welfare and wellbeing
 - Leadership and governance
 - identify priorities for improvement which will be reported as one or more recommended next steps for the setting.
87. The early years coordinating inspector will consider whether all the expected standards are reached within each evaluation area. If this is the case, the early years coordinating inspector will consider whether all the 'strong' grading standards have also been reached securely. At this point the early years coordinating inspector may have enough evidence to consider the 'exceptional' grade.
88. Some minor inconsistencies may lead to priorities for improvement but do not lower the grade. Where one or more standards have not been met for a particular grade, then that grade cannot be given.
89. If the 'expected standard' is not met in any evaluation area, this means that there are breaches of the EYFS requirements that need to be addressed as a priority. If the breaches of the EYFS requirements do not have a significant impact on children's safety, wellbeing and/or learning and developing, and there are no concerns about the provider's suitability, the evaluation area should be graded as 'needs attention'. The early years coordinating inspector will set actions for the provider to meet the relevant statutory requirements relating to the root causes of the breaches.
90. In addition to this, an evaluation area is likely to be graded as 'needs attention' when:
 - the expected standard grade has not been reached
 - no 'urgent improvement' indicators apply.The early years coordinating inspector will use the indicators for 'needs attention' to explain the grading and outline the next steps. These should be based on the expected standards that have not been evidenced in during the inspection, and the associated prompts in the 'gathering evidence' section of the relevant evaluation area.

91. If breaches to the EYFS requirements do have a significant impact on children's safety, wellbeing and/or learning and development, and/or the early years coordinating inspector has concerns about the provider's suitability, the evaluation area is graded 'urgent improvement'. If there are breaches of the EYFS requirements that pose significant risks to children's safety and/or welfare the early years coordinating inspector will contact the senior member of ISI staff immediately who will liaise directly with Ofsted.
92. In addition to this, if any of the 'urgent improvement' indicators apply, the evaluation area is likely to be graded as 'urgent improvement'. The early years coordinating inspector must contact the senior member of staff at ISI when an 'urgent improvement' grade is likely. The early years coordinating inspector should use the relevant expected standards to help craft the setting's next steps, including the associated prompts in the 'gathering evidence' section of the relevant evaluation area.
93. During the inspection, inspectors may identify minor weaknesses in provision or minor administrative errors in record-keeping or policies. The scale and impact of any weaknesses will be taken into consideration by inspectors. Where these do not have a direct impact on children's safety and wellbeing, and leaders can make the necessary improvements or amendments easily before the end of the onsite inspection, inspectors may consider applying proportionality in reaching their gradings for a particular evaluation area. This will be reflected in the text of the inspection report.
94. In considering proportionality, the early years coordinating inspector will consider the criteria for proportionality set out in paragraphs 22-25 above. The early years coordinating inspector must also consider any previous non-compliance. Proportionality may not be applied where the identified weaknesses or errors are indicative of systemic failings in the settings processes and/or provision. Systemic failings include decision-making by leaders based on a lack of understanding of what is required to meet the expected standard, or an inability or reluctance to do so.
95. Safeguarding will be graded as 'met' overall if all the individual safeguarding standards are 'met' and none of the 'not met' standards apply.²
96. If safeguarding is likely to be graded as 'not met', the early years coordinating inspector must call the senior member of staff at ISI to discuss. A 'not met' grading for the safeguarding evaluation area does not automatically mean the setting will be graded 'urgent improvement' in other areas. The early years coordinating inspector will evaluate the impact of the breaches to establish the appropriate grade for other evaluation areas. The setting will likely be reinspected by Ofsted within 6 months if safeguarding is not met. Ofsted may also undertake enforcement activity in between if required.

Final feedback

97. Final feedback for the inspection of the registered setting is given by the early years coordinating inspector at the end of day 2. The early years coordinating inspector and, where relevant, any additional early years inspector who has been involved in the inspection will attend. The reporting inspector for the school inspection and any monitoring inspector may also attend. The maximum

² The safeguarding standards have been developed from the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#), [EYFS statutory framework for childminders](#), [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working together to safeguard children](#).

number of inspectors attending the final feedback meeting will be four. A representative from Ofsted may also attend.

The following people are invited to attend the final feedback of the inspection of the registered early years setting:

- The leader with responsibility for the registered early years setting
- The headteacher of the school
- A senior leader from the school with responsibility for the early years provision
- The nominated individual or representative of the governing body/proprietor.

98. Feedback must clearly identify the key findings from the inspection, and the provisional gradings for each evaluation area. The early years coordinating inspector will explain that any gradings may change as a result of quality assurance.
99. All findings are provisional until the publication of the inspection report. The report for the inspection of the early years registered setting will be published as a separate report at the same time as the report for the school inspection.
100. The early years coordinating inspector will:
- explain the rationale for each provisional grade and the key evidence supporting it, using the language of the inspection toolkit
 - celebrate the key strengths and validate the successes/evaluation of the setting's work
 - highlight any priorities for improvement (including safeguarding, if relevant) and what the setting needs to do to improve, giving sufficient detail so that those attending understand their part in improving the setting, especially the nominated individual and those responsible for governance
 - outline any implications of the inspection findings, including any actions raised; actions must refer to the requirements set out in the Early years foundation stage statutory framework
 - explain that leaders can make a complaint to ISI, following the complaints process which is published on the ISI website.
101. Any breaches of EYFS requirements must be clearly matched to the requirements in the Early years foundation stage statutory framework. A clear explanation must be prepared using examples from the evidence to explain why any standards are not met.
102. Inspectors should leave sufficient preparation time to discuss and/or review formal feedback. They should ensure that points are clear, that there is no repetition or inconsistency, and no contradiction between strengths and relative weaknesses.

After the onsite inspection

When a setting has not achieved a grading of expected standard

103. Within 24 hours of the completion of an inspection with a grading of 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement' or where there are breaches of requirement, the early years coordinating inspector will complete a Form A which will be quality assured by a senior member of staff at ISI and sent to Ofsted's regulatory team.

Report writing

104. The early years coordinating inspector writes the inspection report shortly after the end of the onsite inspection. All inspection reports are subject to ISI's quality assurance processes. These involve ensuring that the evidence supports the gradings for each evaluation area. ISI also checks reports to ensure that they clearly state the reasons for the gradings.
105. A copy of the draft report is sent to the school so that leaders can check for any inaccuracies. This is called the factual accuracy check (FAC).
106. When the report is finalised, following quality assurance, a final copy of the report is sent to the school prior to publication on ISI's website. The final inspection report is also shared with Ofsted.

Quality Assurance

107. ISI's internal quality assurance processes involve a number of different stages. These serve to ensure that ISI inspections findings are reliable and that ISI reports are clear and based on robust evidence.
108. Inspectors are carefully selected and properly trained. They also receive regular updates about our work and any changes to regulations or requirements. Inspectors are assessed for suitability at every stage of their recruitment and training before they lead inspections.
109. ISI has a process for monitoring the quality of the work of all inspectors. ISI has a group of experienced inspectors, which includes senior members of ISI staff, who work as monitors. They regularly join inspections to check the quality and consistency of our work.
110. A team of experienced inspectors and senior members of ISI staff are available on duty for support and to give advice on any inspection.
111. Following every inspection, ISI ask leaders for their views about how the inspection was conducted. ISI feeds this back and provide appropriate additional training and guidance when necessary. Where inspectors fall short of expectations, ISI takes action.

Change Log

Version date	Page and paragraph	Change
September 2026	Page 4, paragraph 1	Added footnote reference to Ofsted guidance Regulating and inspecting association independent schools with an early years registration.
September 2026	Page 8, paragraph 31	New paragraph to make explicit reference to Equality Act 2010 in line with update to Ofsted operating guide for inspectors.
September 2026	Page 8, paragraph 33	Added reference and link to Ofsted: Explore an area tool.
September 2026	Pages 10-11, paragraph 41;	Amended to reflect changes in EYFS statutory requirements, and updates to the Ofsted inspection toolkit and operating guide.
September 2026	Pages 13-14, paragraphs 52, 61	Amended to reflect changes in EYFS statutory requirements, and updates to the Ofsted inspection toolkit and operating guide.
September 2026	Page 14, paragraph 62	Added information relating to provision for looked-after or previously looked-after children in line with update to Ofsted operating guide for inspectors.
September 2026	Page 17, paragraph 86	Clarification that there will always be a recommended next step.
September 2026	Page 18, paragraph 95	Added footnote to provide additional clarification of statutory guidance and to reflect inspection toolkit.