A quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors:

Early learning and childcare quality indicators

September 2025

The structure of the quality indicators

The quality indicators for early learning and childcare (ELC) should be used for all provision types, except for childminding and school age childcare services.

Heading	Quality Indicator
Leadership	Leadership and management of staff and resources
	Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment
	Leadership of continuous improvement
Children thrive and develop in quality spaces	Children experience high quality spaces.
Children play and learn	Playing, learning and developing
	Curriculum
	Learning, teaching and assessment
Children are supported to achieve	Nurturing care and support
	Wellbeing, inclusion and equality
	Children's progress
	Safeguarding and child protection

This table shows the quality indicators for ELC across the four headings of the framework.

Illustrations of practice

All quality indicators have themes to support your self-evaluation. There are illustrations of practice for each theme. These describe what we might see in a setting where the quality of provision is 'very good' or 'weak'.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leadership and management of staff and resources is a Care Inspectorate quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of leadership and management of staff and resources are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for leadership and management of staff and resources

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- vision, values and aims
- self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change
- staff recruitment and induction

About leadership and management of staff and resources

This quality indicator highlights the need for leaders to ensure they have an ambitious, shared vision that focuses on improvements and positive outcomes for all. There should be a strong ethos of continuous improvement which enhances the delivery of high-quality practice. It focuses on accountability, responsibility, and shared values as important features of building and sustaining a highly professional team.

The importance of partnership approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement are highlighted. There is an emphasis on the need for strong leadership and a shared understanding of strengths and areas for development. The impact of self-evaluation and quality assurance leads to improved and sustained positive outcomes for children and families.

This indicator focuses on the management of staffing decisions and the importance of this on the quality of children's overall experiences and outcomes. It supports values-based, safe recruitment procedures that ensure trained, competent and skilled staff are employed to promote positive outcomes for children. This includes a comprehensive induction programme to support and guide staff in their roles and responsibilities.

There is a clear focus on aligning practice with national policy, legislation and rights-based frameworks and standards. This includes the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)](#) and the [Health and Social Care Standards](#) which can support staff in delivering safe, nurturing and responsive care that meets the individual needs of children.

Illustrations of vision, values and aims

'Very good' vision, values and aims

We promote, sustain and are highly committed to a shared vision that reflects the highest possible standards for children, families, partners and the wider community. Children and families are actively included in the design and review of our vision, values and aims. These reflect the high aspirations of our children and families. This ensures that any planned developments or improvements take due account of children's rights, interests, curiosities, needs and preferences.

Leaders create conditions where all people feel confident to initiate well-informed change and share responsibility for the process. This helps us know what is important when meeting the needs of children and families. Effective communication ensures a clear view of our vision, values and aims so that the wider staff team, children and families are included in achieving them.

Our values are embedded in the everyday life of the setting and inform our practice. Leadership is clearly founded on principles of high-quality care and learning, active engagement with children and their families and a quality culture.

'Weak' vision, values and aims

Our vision, values and aims are unclear or are not created with or communicated to children, families, partners and the wider community. We have a limited focus on the importance of improvement.

Children and families do not experience a service which reflects their shared aspirations. Not everyone involved in the setting is aware of our vision values and aims, or their role in promoting these. Our staff are not supported to reflect on the vision values and aims in a meaningful way, and therefore these are not reflected in their practice.

Changes made to our practice and the setting have little impact on children and families. There is a resistance to change which negatively impacts our ability to deliver improved outcomes. Opportunities to reflect and bring about positive change for children, families and each other are missed.

Illustrations of self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

'Very good' self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

Well-considered, purposeful self-evaluation enables us to deliver high-quality care and learning tailored to children's and families' needs and choices. We ensure the views of children, families and partners inform improvement and are central to our self-evaluation process.

Our leaders evidence where these views inform change, secure improvement and lead to positive outcomes for children and families. We reflect well together and use these reflections to bring about positive change.

Our quality assurance and moderation activities, which include well-timed monitoring and data gathering, have agreed standards and expectations that are understood by all staff. Highly effective use is made of evidence to draw conclusions about the quality of the provision and identify suitable approaches to improvement.

Sustainable change is achieved because there is an appropriate pace of change. Highly effective practice is identified and shared within and beyond the service to promote improvements which have led to positive outcomes for children.

Leaders ensure that high-quality learning through play is at the heart of improvement planning. Continuous improvement, success and achievement for all children are central to the planned implementation of strategies for improvement. These are relevant to local, national and international advice, and research is used effectively to support the thoughtful changes.

'Weak' self-evaluation, quality assurance and implementing change

Our self-evaluation for improvement is at an early stage of development, and as a result our improvements or changes to practice are rarely sustained. Children and families are not meaningfully involved in our self-evaluation process. As a result, they do not feel well informed about changes or why they are happening.

Our children and families do not experience safe and quality care due to the inconsistent and ineffective use of our improvement planning. Insufficient skills and capacity within our team hinder our ability to effectively support and drive improvements.

We do not effectively enable staff or families to confidently highlight complaints or suggest improvements. Leaders fail to respond promptly to feedback, and therefore positive change is too slow to make improvements.

Opportunities to engage a range of partners have not been taken or used to inform our improvement planning. We are isolated and may be out of touch with national perspectives as a result. There are significant gaps in the areas covered by our quality assurance systems. Inconsistencies in practice are not fully identified and do not highlight areas for improvement. As a result, children's experiences and outcomes are poor. Inconsistencies in care are not fully identified and do not highlight areas for improvement.

Illustrations of staff recruitment and induction

'Very good' staff recruitment and induction

The importance of recruiting and retaining a stable and skilled team is recognised by leaders as essential to the wellbeing of children and staff.

Staff are recruited in a way that has been informed by all aspects of safer recruitment practices. Leaders ensure new staff are safely recruited and that they understand their responsibilities within the team. We prioritise values-based recruitment by clearly communicating the values that matter most to us and assessing whether candidates' values align. Children and families have opportunities to be involved in the process in a meaningful way. They are kept informed and introduced to any new or temporary staff.

We have induction programmes that are thorough and personalised to meet the different roles within the team. Leaders ensure new staff are confident in meeting the needs of individual children. We utilise a range of resources, including the national induction resource, to equip newly recruited staff and those in new roles with the knowledge and skills necessary for providing high-quality care for babies and children.

We have clear processes for mentoring and supporting staff, with time allocated to take this forward. Mentors are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and they have written information they can refer to. Together these approaches support high-quality outcomes for all children.

'Weak' staff recruitment and induction

The recruitment procedures may compromise the welfare or safety of children. Important elements of the process may be ignored. For example, exploring gaps in employment history, or disciplinary records; or allowing staff to start working before all the required checks have been undertaken or received.

Our induction approach is limited to a one-off event focused on policies and procedures. Little consideration is given to the care, support and learning needs of children. As a result, new staff do not have all the information they need to safely care for and support children. Mentoring arrangements, where these exist, are not well considered and do not support staff to better understand their role. Staff undertaking mentoring roles have insufficient time allocated to do this well.

Challenge questions for leadership and management of staff and resources

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do we engage others to develop a shared vision and purpose for our setting?
- How well do our vision, values and aims inform our daily practice?
- What impact do our vision, values and aims have on improving the quality of the early learning and childcare (ELC) we provide?
- How do we know our quality assurance processes improve outcomes for children and families?
- How well do staff understand their responsibility in improvement through self-evaluation?
- To what extent are staff empowered to make changes?
- How has the use of best practice documents and national guidance led to improvement in children's experiences and outcomes?
- How have we used children's voices to evaluate and inform our practice and provision?
- How do we engage our families and children to ensure they have a role in our improvement journey?
- How do we ensure staff recruitment processes reflect current best practice and national guidance?
- In what ways do we ensure our recruitment process attracts people with the right values, skills and knowledge for their role?
- How do we ensure that our induction processes are tailored to meet the needs of different staff roles and responsibilities?

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

Staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment is a Care Inspectorate quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- staff skills, knowledge and values
- staff deployment

About staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

This quality indicator focuses on the importance of skilled interactions to promote children's confidence and to have a positive influence on their lives as they develop and learn. It highlights the importance of continuous professional development for staff being promoted through highly effective use of reflective practice, feedback and support. It recognises that professional learning should be well planned and informed by local, national and international evidence and research. This should be reviewed and matched to the identified needs of individual staff.

There is an awareness that staff should have appropriate professional registration and should understand and adhere to the relevant codes of practice. Recognition is given to the need for a positive, compassionate and responsive culture where children thrive.

This indicator focuses on ensuring that staffing levels and deployment take account of the range of staff skills, as well as the routines and activities of the day. It recognises the need for responsive staff deployment and the importance of ensuring appropriate staffing throughout the day and across the week. There is an understanding of the need to provide continuity of staff contact for children, while providing a safe, high-quality service to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Illustrations of staff skills, knowledge and values

'Very good' skills, knowledge and values

We have a clear understanding of how children learn and develop, having high aspirations for children's achievements. We make very good use of professional development opportunities that link directly to enhanced outcomes for children, their individual learning needs and our improvement plan. Research, best practice, national and local policy, underpinning legislation, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Health and Social Care Standards are used in this process.

A wide range of opportunities are available for staff to hold professional discussions and we use these to inform practice. We are highly reflective and we engage in these work-based discussions to build individual and team knowledge and effectiveness. We maintain meaningful records of the impact of our learning and development and have a clear learning action plan.

Highly effective supervision enables us to be clear about our responsibilities. Celebrating success and learning from mistakes is an integral part of our ethos, leading to a culture of openness where we feel proud to work in our setting and safe to discuss practice when errors occur. Shared values guide our work and result in positive outcomes for children. Where required, staff maintain registration with a professional body and follow the codes of practice effectively.

'Weak' skills, knowledge and values

The quality of outcomes and experiences for children and families is negatively impacted as we fail to, or are not enabled to, engage in professional learning to improve our practice. Where learning needs are identified, these are not fully taken forward. This results in gaps in our professional knowledge and skills, which impacts negatively on the quality of children's experiences.

Where staff do have appropriate knowledge, this is not shared effectively across the team. There is an absence of professional discussion to support each other's development and learning. As a result, children do not benefit from shared knowledge and skills within the team. We do not fully understand our responsibility to maintain professional registration. Where registration with professional bodies is required, this is incomplete or may have

lapsed. Staff may not take sufficient account of the codes of practice in their work. This adversely impacts the quality of children's experiences, increases risk and reduces trust in the service we provide.

Illustrations of staff deployment

'Very good' staff deployment

Leaders are open and honest about decisions on staffing. They make highly effective use of the diverse experience, knowledge and skills of the staff group to ensure children experience safe and responsive learning and care.

Arrangements are in place to promote continuity of care across the day, week and throughout children's ELC experience, ensuring positive transitions and communication with families. To ensure this is consistent, breaks are planned to minimise impact on children while enabling staff to rest and be refreshed.

Staff communicate well, are flexible and support each other. We work as a team to ensure deployment is effective in ensuring high-quality experiences and outcomes for children. Approaches to staff deployment ensure new or inexperienced staff have the appropriate level of support from experienced colleagues. This allows us to share skills and knowledge across the team and to feel confident that we are working well together.

Arrangements for absence, both planned and unplanned, support minimum disruption to children's routines. Children are prepared in advance for their key worker's absence, wherever possible.

'Weak' staff deployment

We do not feel able to raise issues or concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children as a result of decisions about staff deployment. We do not take responsibility to highlight any gaps in staffing and opportunities to improve are missed.

Communication and team working between us is limited, leading to gaps in interactions and supervision of children across the day. Our lack of flexibility and support across the staff team significantly compromises the quality of experiences and outcomes for children. We lack confidence to talk about mistakes, which has the potential to lead to harm to children.

Arrangements for busier times of the day are ineffective in ensuring that we can fully meet children's needs. Activities become task orientated rather than an opportunity for high-quality engagement and interaction. We do not always receive sufficient breaks or take breaks at a time when higher levels of supervision are required, such as mealtimes.

Children's routines and experiences are disrupted as arrangements for planned absence are poorly managed. Children and families are not always advised when staff will be absent and are not prepared for, or introduced to, temporary staff.

Challenge questions for staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How do we use self-evaluation to ensure that staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to support children to be the best that they can be?
- How well does professional learning impact positively on outcomes for children and in what ways?
- How do we build on individual skills and interests which lead to improvements for children?
- How do we engage and encourage leadership at all levels?
- In what ways are we maximising opportunities for staff to work and learn together?
- What approaches do we take to tasks to ensure children are supported across the whole day?
- How does staff deployment meet the individual care and support needs of all children throughout the session?
- How do we promote a positive staff ethos and support staff wellbeing?
- How do we know staff enjoy working here and feel involved and part of an effective team?
- How do we consider staff wellbeing to ensure we provide safe and high-quality care and the best outcomes for children?

Leadership of continuous improvement

Leadership of continuous improvement is an HM Inspector quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Themes for leadership of continuous improvement

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- pedagogical leadership
- leadership and professional learning
- planning and continuous improvement

About leadership of continuous improvement

This quality indicator relates to leadership of improvements that are ambitious and reflect the views and aspirations of all stakeholders. These build upon a shared vision and values. It highlights the importance of strong strategic guidance and direction to ensure early years pedagogy and practice are of the highest quality.

It recognises the importance of high-quality professional learning and using evidence-based research to inform practice. It highlights the impact of effective leadership at all levels which improves pedagogy, educational outcomes and equity for all.

This quality indicator reflects the expectation that leaders use robust self-evaluation to plan and implement well-paced, sustainable change to improve outcomes for all children.

Illustrations of pedagogical leadership

'Very good' pedagogical leadership

Senior leaders are visible and provide strong strategic guidance and direction. They support all staff to provide high-quality learning and teaching to secure children's progress. Senior leaders promote and support innovation, creativity and professional enquiry. They enable staff to be highly effective leaders of learning.

There is a strong focus on improving wellbeing and educational outcomes for children. Staff demonstrate a determination to recognise, respect and promote children's rights. This reduces inequity, challenges discrimination and improves outcomes for all. We actively use local and national guidance and evidence-based research about how children learn. This informs our pedagogy and all aspects of our practice.

We have a shared understanding of pedagogy and how this enables the implementation of the curriculum. Senior leaders monitor the quality of interactions, experiences and spaces and provide meaningful feedback to staff to ensure continuous improvement.

'Weak' pedagogical leadership

Our lack of strong [pedagogical leadership](#), strategic direction and effective monitoring has a significant impact on the quality of children's learning experiences. Our interactions, experiences and the learning environment are not improving consistently, and there is insufficient focus on pedagogy that secures children's progress.

Our guidance and feedback to improve practice is limited or inconsistent. As a result, our weaknesses persist, and the overall quality of education remains variable or low.

Illustrations of leadership and professional learning

'Very good' leadership and professional learning

Through highly effective leadership at all levels, we consistently achieve high standards. We motivate, support, and inspire others to improve their pedagogy and practice continually. Across our team, there is a strong ethos of valuing professional learning, development and collaborative working to build capacity and sustain highly effective practice.

We engage in a broad range of professional learning that enables us to remain knowledgeable, skilled and up to date in our practice. We use professional learning and development opportunities very well to influence and support pedagogy, practice and improvement priorities to improve outcomes for all children, with a strong focus on equity and inclusion.

'Weak' leadership and professional learning

Our professional learning is not consistently well planned, well used, or aligned to the needs of the setting. Development opportunities are not leading to measurable improvements in pedagogy or outcomes for children.

We have limited evidence of valuing continuous learning or supporting the development of shared understanding and confidence in practice. This weakens our collective capacity to improve quality or address areas of development.

Illustrations of planning and continuous improvement

'Very good' planning and continuous improvement

Our clear co-created vision and values reflect the ambitions of staff, children, stakeholders and the community. They underpin the setting's ethos and context, which reflects very well the needs of children and families and improvement work.

Ongoing critical reflection and robust self-evaluation involves all staff, children and stakeholders. This leads to clear plans for improvement with specific, measurable targets to support the implementation of well-informed change.

Senior leaders guide and manage the direction and pace of change very successfully. Highly effective strategies are used to monitor and evaluate the impact of change, drawing on a range of evidence, including self-evaluation and inform future actions. All those involved with the setting are clear about improvements and the positive impact on the quality of ELC provided.

'Weak' planning and continuous improvement

Our self-evaluation is not robust or well used to inform improvement planning. We do not have a shared or rigorous understanding of our strengths and areas for development. Our collaboration and consultation with staff, children, and stakeholders is limited and does not lead to meaningful or evidence-informed decisions. Self-evaluation evidence is not used effectively to identify priorities, pace change, or evaluate impact. As a result, our improvement is slow or not sustained. These weaknesses are having a negative impact on children's outcomes and the overall quality of early learning and childcare provided.

Challenge questions for leadership of continuous improvement

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How well do we use evidence-based research, local and national guidance to inform our pedagogy, practice and improvements?
- How well do we support one another, share practice and take responsibility for leading improvements?
- In what ways do we use robust self-evaluation to make decisions about professional learning and improvement?
- In what ways do senior leaders role model and influence high-quality practice?
- How well and in what ways does monitoring of the quality of the early learning and childcare (ELC) we provide influence change and improvement?
- To what extent does professional learning influence changes to our practice that impact positively on outcomes for children? How do we know?
- In what ways do we support children, staff and stakeholders to share their views, experiences and opinions? To what extent do their views influence change?
- How effectively do we engage others to develop a shared vision and purpose for our setting?
- How well do our vision and values underpin the work of the setting? What impact do they have on improving the quality of ELC we provide?

Children experience high-quality spaces

Children experience high-quality spaces is a Care Inspectorate quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations for children experience high-quality spaces are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for children experience high-quality spaces

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- quality, safety and maintenance of spaces
- children influence and affect change
- information management

About children experience high-quality spaces

This quality indicator highlights the importance of having a safe, secure and inspiring physical environment, whether delivered indoors, outdoors or a blend of both. It demonstrates the need for physical spaces that reflect children's needs and interests. The environment should be inclusive and celebrate diversity, including differences in speech, language and communication. When designing and evaluating spaces for children, careful consideration should be given to current research and best practice. Space to Grow and Realising the Ambition should be used as key resources.

There is recognition of the right to daily outdoor play, indicating that this should be valued and provided well. The importance of staff understanding the impact outdoor play can have on children's overall development is highlighted, as well as the opportunities it provides for learning about the wider world.

This indicator notes the importance of a well-maintained physical environment for children. It highlights the need for regular maintenance of buildings, resources and equipment used. It supports an appropriate level of risk assessment to minimise potential risks and to keep children safe from harm, including the need for rigorous infection prevention and control.

There is recognition that whilst children must be kept safe, children's play provides an opportunity to take and learn from measured risk. All aspects of security should be considered, including the security of buildings and the storage of confidential records and information.

Illustrations of quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

'Very good' quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

Our physical environment, whether offered indoors or outdoors, is welcoming, fully meets children's needs, and is well equipped. It gives a strong message to children that they matter. We make the best use of available resources to create, sustain and enhance a motivating physical environment. As a result, children experience high-quality care and learning centred on their needs and interests.

We recognise the importance of daily outdoor play and the benefits of this for enhancing learning and wellbeing. We support, facilitate and encourage children to explore and build independence. Children are supported to actively explore and learn about the wider world.

We take prompt action to ensure the safety and security of children, visitors and each other. Staff undertake, understand and share appropriate risk assessments. We keep children accounted for by remaining vigilant to risk. We always know who is in our care, whether they are indoors, outdoors or in the wider community. As a result, children are safe and their opportunities to enjoy challenging and fun play experiences are not compromised.

Whilst we prioritise children's safety, we embrace a positive, balanced approach to risk in children's play. Children engage in a broad range of challenging and interesting play opportunities that support and extend their development and learning. Through these experiences children build self-confidence. They learn to assess and manage risks for themselves, developing essential skills and resilience. We have received robust training on infection prevention and control measures. This means we have a clear understanding and confidence to provide and promote a high-quality, clean and safe environment. This includes understanding of the arrangements for cleaning as well as in practising food safety.

Where children require personal care, arrangements are effectively planned, and staff maintain high levels of infection prevention and control. Children's privacy, dignity and preferences are fully respected and there are appropriate changing facilities. Arrangements for the monitoring, maintenance and repair of equipment and vehicles function well, and are implemented consistently. Damaged items are replaced promptly.

'Weak' quality, safety and maintenance of spaces

The physical environment may look or feel neglected, rather than warm and welcoming for children. There is limited attention to detail such as homely touches, decoration, and the quality of furniture and resources is poor. There may be unpleasant smells or intrusive noise levels.

The breadth and balance of resources do not sufficiently meet children's development needs or offer challenge and opportunities for exploration. The physical environment, furniture and fittings are generally inadequate, with limited opportunities to display interesting materials and children's work. The layout of the physical environment does not enable children to lead their own play and learning. The resources we provide do not support children to achieve.

We demonstrate limited understanding of the benefits of the outdoors to children. Children's views do not sufficiently influence their access to outdoors. Current best practice or research is not used effectively to inform our knowledge and practice in this area. We do not always recognise when children need more energetic experiences. Potential barriers to outdoor play and learning have not been recognised or given adequate consideration. This means that the physical environment does not meet children's needs.

We do not always work well together to promote a safe environment for children. We may have limited understanding of children's development and may not recognise when everyday items can pose risk. As a result, children may be at risk from avoidable harm.

We may unnecessarily limit children's experiences and children's confidence may be affected. Excessive restrictions may be placed on play and learning opportunities, compromising the quality of children's experiences. Our procedures for infection prevention and control are not robust and heighten the risk of infection.

Arrangements for security within our setting, outdoors and in the wider community may not be well considered. There is the potential for children to exit the setting or be unaccounted for across the day, exposing them to risk of harm.

Illustrations of children influence and affect change

'Very good' children influence and affect change

Children have high levels of involvement in influencing the design and use of spaces, which gives them a strong, clear message that they matter. We actively engage with children to enable them to direct their play and experiences in the way they choose. Children are listened to and know that their views matter. We understand the capabilities of all children, including babies. We adapt our practice to meet their needs and enable their voices.

Our environment provides opportunities for children to make decisions and act independently within the safe boundaries of our setting. They are encouraged to lead most aspects of their play, and we guide them to take on responsibilities at times like snack or when they are in the garden. Through outdoor play, children are learning about sustainability, gaining a deeper understanding of how to care for and preserve their natural environment. Our approach keeps children engaged and increases their confidence.

We have an inclusive environment where children have a belief in their abilities. Carefully selected and well-positioned furniture and resources support all children to make choices and freely play. Resources and materials available to children are varied, adaptive and responsive, catering to children's individual abilities, needs and interests. We understand the positive impact that rich, multi-sensory play has on children's learning, resilience and wellbeing.

We have a supportive environment where children are valued and celebrated. High-quality resources and spaces promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Children, their families and wider communities are positively reflected in the resources, spaces and experiences available. Children feel seen and included. Our enriching setting fully supports children to develop their knowledge, respect and understanding of their community and wider world.

'Weak' children influence and affect change

Children's needs and views are not consistently sought or taken into consideration when designing the physical environment or when planning experiences and shaping daily routines.

Children's independence is not supported and they are unable to direct their own play and activities in the way they choose. Children are not engaged and motivated enough in their play, compromising progress in their learning and development.

Our practice related to caring for resources, including the natural environment, does not take account of sustainability. We provide very few, if any, opportunities for children to learn about sustainability and caring for their natural environment, encouraging poor habits in respect of reducing waste and the impact of our use of natural resources.

Our provision of play resources and equipment is limited and, in some cases, outdated and inappropriate. Children may lack motivation and interest due to the lack of stimulating resources and activity. Those available lack breadth and balance and do not sufficiently meet children's development needs or offer challenge and opportunities for exploration.

In some cases, children and their families may experience discrimination as a result of outdated or inappropriate resources. This has the potential to negatively influence children's self-esteem and their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

We may demonstrate an approach to risk that is either risk averse or not well considered. This is evident in the layout of the spaces indoors and outdoors. This may result in the potential for harm. We may not engage effectively with parents/carers to deepen their understanding of the benefits of riskier outdoor play and learning experiences.

Illustrations of information management

'Very good' information management

Our physical environment provides a secure and safe setting for children while respecting their rights and reflecting our overarching aims and objectives. Any use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) is lawful, fair and proportionate, and protects their dignity. It is only used for purposes that support the delivery of safe, effective and compassionate care for children.

Protection of children's personal information is paramount and complies with relevant best practice and legal requirements. Our leaders and staff are well informed about their responsibilities and have the skills to carry these out robustly.

Efficient and effective record keeping systems are in place. This includes the management of electronic information which is in line with general data protection requirements and advice on cyber threats. Our staff fully understand and implement their roles and responsibilities in relation to information management.

'Weak' information management

The use of CCTV is not well understood by staff. Our leaders and staff are not well informed about their responsibilities and infringements of rights of children, families and staff may occur as a result. Families may not have been consulted about any CCTV or informed of their rights. The arrangements for CCTV do not meet the requirements of current legislation.

Arrangements for the storage of and processing of children's personal information are poorly managed and do not comply with relevant legislation and best practice. Our staff do not have an awareness or understanding of their role in using information appropriately or storing it securely. Where electronic systems are in place they are not secure or suitable.

Challenge questions for children experience high quality spaces

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How can we be confident that our physical environment maximises opportunities for children to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play?
- To what extent does the physical environment support different types of play?
- How can we be confident that our physical environment is maintained to the highest standards, ensuring a safe and healthy environment for children?
- How do we know our physical environment is secure and that children cannot leave unsupervised?
- How do we ensure children's privacy, dignity and preferences are fully respected?
- How do we know our setting provides a wide range of challenging outdoor play and learning experiences that promote children's health and wellbeing?
- How well are children enabled to select and make use of high-quality resources which meet their needs, interests and development?
- How inclusive is our setting for all children and families? Does it accommodate and promote emotional safety?
- How do we promote diversity, equity and inclusion and how are these positively reflected in the resources, spaces, and experiences available?
- How are children's files and information stored to ensure they are secure?
- Do we demonstrate an understanding of how data protection laws operate?

Playing, learning and developing

Playing, learning and developing is a Care Inspectorate quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of playing, learning and developing are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for playing, learning and developing

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- children's engagement
- quality of interactions
- child-centred planning and assessment

About playing, learning and developing

This quality indicator focuses on children's right to play, emphasising that they should have fun, experience joy and have high-quality play and learning experiences indoors and outdoors. It is essential that children are meaningfully and actively involved in leading their own play and learning.

There is an expectation that staff understand how playing helps children develop skills for life and learning. Interactions, experiences and spaces should successfully enrich play and learning, taking into account the individual needs, interests and development of each child. Children should make sustained progress in their learning through responsive planning approaches.

The indicator highlights the importance of staff using observations effectively to recognise and extend children's knowledge, understanding, skills and achievements. These should inform next steps in planning to support children's development, learning and wellbeing, enabling them to progress well. Staff should skilfully engage in quality, child-led interactions, using a balance of comments and developmentally appropriate questions to enhance and extend children's thinking. Children are supported to recognise, enjoy and celebrate their successes.

Illustrations of children's engagement

'Very good' children's engagement

We have a strong understanding of how children develop, learn and progress. Our staff skilfully use relevant theory and practice to support their delivery of high-quality play experiences that excite and engage children as they learn. Children are successful, responsible and confident in their play as a result of the high-quality experiences we offer. They are highly motivated and fully engaged by the range of rich, challenging, planned and responsive experiences both indoors and outdoors.

Well-considered innovations and creative approaches successfully engage children's imagination and enrich their play and learning. A broad range of skills, including language, literacy, and numeracy, are enhanced through a balance of child and adult-led interactions, and playful experiences. Additionally, consideration is given to how children can deepen their learning with and through digital technology.

We work effectively with families to support their understanding of the benefits to children of play-based learning experiences which challenge and delight them. This collaborative approach fosters the development of trust and cooperation, which supports children's wellbeing and development and gives them opportunities to flourish.

Children make informed choices about their play and learning within a creative, challenging and enabling environment. We give them the time, space and support they need to make decisions and use their voice. We are skilled at using high-quality interactions, spaces and experiences to extend and sustain children's interests.

'Weak' children's engagement

Children have limited opportunities to lead their play. This restricts their learning and development. There is little to challenge or ignite children's imagination and curiosity, or to encourage them to explore their ideas.

Our understanding of child-led play is underdeveloped. Children's individual development needs and their interests are not reflected within interactions, experiences and spaces. As a result, children are not engaged. They miss opportunities to learn, build confidence and make choices. Children therefore lack interest and motivation and may experience boredom, upset or frustration.

Children have few opportunities to access and engage with their own or wider communities. This limits access to a wide range of resources and experiences to enhance their play and development opportunities.

Illustrations of quality of interactions

'Very good' quality of interactions

Careful observation allows us to interpret children's interests and provide opportunities to extend their thinking without directing their play. We use a variety of approaches to respond to children's cues to support development of self-regulation, empathy, confidence, creativity and curiosity.

Responsive and caring interactions support the development of communication, language, movement and social development through effective modelling of these skills. We support children through approaches such as sustained shared thinking, wondering aloud and balancing comments with developmentally appropriate questions to extend and expand their thinking. We understand that interacting and exploring with children is a valuable way to build vocabulary and foster understanding, and a sense of wonder and excitement about the world. We enable next steps and give praise for trying things out.

Our children have frequent, appropriate opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills through imaginative play and storytelling. This helps children to extend their own thinking, practise new skills and consolidate their learning in ways which are meaningful to them.

We enable children to play and learn at their own pace, having fun as they explore the world around them. We take time to understand children's verbal and nonverbal communication which helps us to judge when to interact and when to wait and observe. We encourage children's interactions with each other, recognising the important role other children have in enriching play. This enables children to make the most of their interactions and experiences.

'Weak' quality of interactions

Our staff do not demonstrate an understanding of how children learn and develop, or the support strategies which best enable children to learn as they play. Interactions and conversations with children lack warmth or are directive, and do not build on their emotional security or interests.

We do not identify children's early communication and language cues or do not support their preferred ways of communicating. This results in missed opportunities for children to make progress at their own pace and can mean children become passive, upset or frustrated.

We are not child-focused during interactions and fail to recognise and value children's thoughts and processes during play. We narrowly focus on only one or two elements of children's learning, failing to reflect a true, holistic picture of each child's development and their achievements. Children are not fully supported to extend their play and learning, and their need for support, reassurance or intervention is often missed.

Illustrations of child-centred planning and assessment

'Very good' child-centred planning and assessment

Children are at the centre of all planning. We are skilled in recognising the different stages in children's play and learning and these are thoroughly considered when planning new experiences and opportunities. We use observations of individual children's patterns of play to plan, support, challenge and extend their learning. This enables children to make progress at their own pace.

Children are highly motivated and fully engaged by the range of rich, challenging play and learning opportunities, offered through a balance of intentional and responsive planning. Experiences reflect children's ideas, aspirations, curiosities and meaningful next steps in their learning.

Careful observations and effective assessments recognise and promote children's progress and achievements. Any additional supports are identified, planned for and implemented. Our highly responsive approach ensures children are developing a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills for life and learning.

We work together with children, families and partners, inviting them to share their knowledge. This deepens our understanding and planning for each child's learning journey. We share updates on children's progress and celebrate their successes and achievements.

'Weak' child-centred planning and assessment

We miss important opportunities to observe and assess children during their play. This leads to gaps in our understanding of what they can do, their interests and how they are developing. We also fail to use the information that families and partners share with us. This makes it difficult to plan effectively to meet each child's unique needs and interests, including any additional support required. As a result, some children are not getting the right learning opportunities through play and are not being challenged at the right level.

There are limited or inconsistent approaches in place to evaluate children's progress and achievements, or to use this information to plan for next steps in learning. Information gathered is not individualised or used effectively to plan the spaces, experiences and interactions each child needs to thrive.

Observations are irregular and do not link to individual children's interests or their stages of play and learning. This results in a lack of understanding of progress over time. Families are not involved or given high-quality information on their children's learning, which results in a lack of consistency and continuity.

Challenge questions for playing, learning and developing

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How well do we support and encourage children's natural curiosity, creativity and problem solving?
- What approaches are we using to promote children's developing skills over a broad range of areas, such as emotional and social development, emergent language skills, literacy and numeracy?
- How can children be supported to have confidence in leading their own learning?
- How do we ensure we keep up to date with relevant theory and demonstrate how our understanding of child development supports high-quality play and learning experiences?
- How do we ensure our approach to children's needs recognises the independent thoughts and feelings of children as individuals?
- How do we approach support for children to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills?
- How well do we support staff in undertaking their role in planning for and evaluating children's progress?
- How effective are our processes to evaluate children's development, progress and achievements? How well does this information gathered about children's progress inform our planning and reporting to parents/carers and others?
- How do we maximise opportunities for children to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play and learning?

Curriculum

Curriculum is an HM Inspector quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Themes for curriculum

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- curriculum rationale and design
- continuity and progression in the curriculum
- partnerships
- skills for life and learning

About curriculum

This quality indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs, interests, rights and progress of children at the centre of curriculum design and implementation. Curriculum is defined as the totality of all that is planned for children from ELC, through school and beyond.

It emphasises that children are entitled to a curriculum underpinned by the principles of curriculum design and enriched through meaningful learning experiences indoors, outdoors and within the community. It recognises the need for all children to experience opportunities to develop the interests, knowledge, skills, and attributes they will need to adapt, thrive and achieve in today's world. This quality indicator also recognises the importance of the curriculum supporting progress in children's learning as they enter the setting and at key points of transition.

Illustrations of curriculum rationale and design

'Very good' curriculum rationale and design

Our curriculum is ambitious, holistic and built upon trusting, nurturing relationships. It promotes and upholds the rights of the child as stated in the UNCRC. Local and national guidance and evidence-based research influence and inform us as we review and refresh our curricular approaches.

Our creative and responsive approach to curriculum design ensures that learning is current, dynamic and supports children to receive their entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Outdoor learning is a valued and embedded part of our curriculum design. It offers rich opportunities for inquiry, exploration and wellbeing, and is planned progressively to support children's development and learning across curricular areas. We ensure challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance across the curriculum. Creativity and learning for sustainability are embedded in our curriculum design.

The purpose of our curriculum is clear and understood by staff, children, families and partners. Our curriculum supports us to be clear on the knowledge and skills that underpin curriculum areas. We ensure our curriculum supports children to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

'Weak' curriculum rationale and design

There are important weaknesses in the design and implementation of our curriculum. We do not make effective use of national guidance or evidence-based research to inform our approach.

Our rationale for our curriculum is unclear and is not underpinned by the principles for curriculum design. While we may offer children a range of experiences indoors and outdoors, these are not planned or progressive. These experiences do not result in children developing sufficient knowledge, skills or attributes.

Illustrations of continuity and progression in the curriculum

'Very good' continuity and progression in the curriculum

Our curriculum is highly responsive to the uniqueness of each child, their family and the context of our community. It is co-created with stakeholders to deliver excellence and equity for all children. The implementation of our curriculum supports children to receive continuity and progression in learning across all curricular areas.

Our staff use robust approaches for gathering, recording and sharing information about learning that informs the implementation of our curriculum. We work collaboratively with colleagues to ensure all children experience high-quality transitions within and beyond the setting. Our approaches to transition are highly effective in building on children's learning to support curriculum continuity and progression.

'Weak' continuity and progression in the curriculum

Our lack of information on children as learners significantly impacts on how we support continuity and progression within and across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. Planning is not consistently based on what children already know and can do. Transitions do not support or build on prior learning. This results in missed opportunities to extend or deepen learning.

Illustrations of partnerships

'Very good' partnerships

We know our community and context very well and seek out and foster meaningful relationships with a wide range of partners. Our curriculum is significantly enriched through these strong relationships and the highly effective contributions of carefully chosen and sustained partnerships.

We value and respect the essential contributions of families to children's learning. Parents/carers understand the role they play and are empowered to contribute to our curriculum. We engage very effectively with parents/carers and support a range of parental engagement activities, including family learning. We actively involve stakeholders in meaningful ways to plan and deliver exciting and engaging opportunities across the curriculum.

'Weak' partnerships

Our partnerships are limited and not well integrated into curriculum planning or delivery. The range of partnerships that we have are not of high enough quality or quantity to enrich our curriculum or reflect the needs of our setting. We do not engage families meaningfully as partners in learning. This limits the relevance and reach of the curriculum we provide.

Illustrations for skills for life and learning

'Very good' skills for life and learning

We provide very good opportunities to support the development of children's skills for life and learning. This includes a knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live and grow. Children develop these skills through a broad range of experiences within motivating and relevant contexts.

Children ask questions, consider and make connections across learning to make sense of and care for the world around them. Digital skills are embedded across our curriculum, enabling children to explore, create and connect with the world beyond their immediate experience.

Our nurturing approaches ensure that children develop positive attitudes towards change and show determination to succeed in their chosen experiences. All our children are supported to develop the skills, confidence and motivation to initiate and participate in improvements to our setting and community.

'Weak' skills for life and learning

Our curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities for children to develop the skills and attributes they need to adapt, thrive and learn. Experiences are often disconnected from real-world or meaningful contexts.

Digital skills and outdoor learning are not embedded, limiting children's opportunities to develop essential skills. As a result, children's learning lacks challenge, coherence and depth, and outcomes are diminished.

Challenge questions for curriculum

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How do we ensure the rationale for our curriculum is underpinned by children's rights and informed by local and national guidance and evidence-based research?
- In what ways and how effectively do we involve staff and stakeholders to co-create the curriculum to respond to the needs and interests of individual children?
- In what ways do we share the purpose of our curriculum with children, parents/carers, staff, and partners?
- To what extent does the curriculum take account of and respond to potential barriers in learning?
- How well do we ensure continuity and progression in the curriculum at key points of transition including when children move onto another playroom, setting or school?
- How do our partnerships enhance and positively impact the design and implementation of the curriculum?
- In what ways does our curriculum foster creativity, enterprise, outdoor learning and learning for sustainability?
- To what extent does our curriculum promote equality and diversity?
- How well does our curriculum promote and support children's skills for life and learning including learning with, through and about digital technologies?

Learning, teaching and assessment

Learning, teaching and assessment is an HM Inspector quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Themes for learning, teaching and assessment

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- children's learning and engagement
- interactions to support learning
- planning and assessment
- tracking and monitoring

About learning, teaching and assessment

This quality indicator focuses on how children benefit from access to high-quality spaces and well-established routines that help them feel secure and ready to engage. It explores how children are supported to build positive relationships, regulate their emotions, and purposefully participate in a wide range of motivating learning experiences. It demonstrates the importance of staff having a high level of skill supported by strong pedagogical leadership. This includes a clear understanding of pedagogy, the concept of play, how children learn, children's rights and children's behaviour.

It places value on high-quality relationships, consistent expectations, and skilled interactions that enable children to sustain engagement, follow routines, and build independence in their learning. This indicator highlights the importance of observing and interacting sensitively with children to plan and assess their learning. It recognises the value of involving children fully in planning their learning indoors, outdoors and within the local community. This quality indicator emphasises the importance of robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress to ensure staff know all children very well as learners.

Illustrations of children's learning and engagement

'Very good' children's learning and engagement

We understand the importance of building relationships and developing secure attachments with children. As a result, relationships with children, and between children, are very positive and enable them to feel valued, safe and secure. Clear, consistent routines and expectations help children settle, build confidence and develop independence in their learning. Children contribute meaningfully to the setting and influence choices and decisions about their learning. Children's wellbeing and developmental needs are met very well through carefully considered transitions, experiences, and learning environments.

We make very effective use of indoors, outdoors and the local community to provide high-quality, real-life experiences. Our children are motivated and sustain engagement as they interact purposefully with a rich range of challenging and open-ended opportunities across the curriculum. We are highly effective in using the environment to support children's learning. Children explore, experiment, and develop curiosity and creativity through a wide range of high-quality resources and spaces. We carefully consider the flow of the day, taking into account opportunities for children to maximise learning, be active and offer time and space to rest.

'Weak' children's learning and engagement

We do not sufficiently understand early learning pedagogy, the concept of play, how children learn and children's rights. As a result, the learning environment does not support children to be curious, creative or to learn progressively through play.

Experiences and spaces do not consistently promote purposeful engagement or sustained motivation. Our children have limited opportunities to influence their learning. Transitions are not always well planned and this affects how well children's developmental and emotional needs are met. Our children are not consistently supported to understand expectations or manage their behaviour in ways that promote positive engagement and learning.

Illustrations of interactions to support learning

'Very good' interactions to support learning

We have a very good understanding of early learning pedagogy and skilfully put this into practice to support children's learning. Respectful, responsive relationships and children's rights are at the heart of all our interactions. We listen carefully to all children's views and are attuned to their needs, interests and learning styles. We value their opinions and support all children to express their views.

Our interactions promote a calm, purposeful learning environment. We thoughtfully support children to understand expectations and manage their behaviour in ways that enable everyone to learn well together. We interact sensitively with parents/carers and involve them in all aspects of their child's learning.

Our highly-skilled staff know when to observe play and interact using well-considered questions, commentary and modelling to support and extend children's learning. We encourage and support children to be independent learners as they develop, apply and consolidate their skills. We make highly effective use of digital technologies to enrich children's learning and teaching. We have a well-considered approach to our use of digital technologies and take into account children's developmental stages. Children learn about and use a wide variety of digital technologies in a safe and creative way to support and extend their learning.

'Weak' interactions to support learning

Our interactions do not consistently support children's development or extend their learning. We are not confident in using questioning, modelling or commentary to enrich play. Children's learning with and through digital technologies is limited.

Our relationships with children and families are not sufficiently responsive or respectful to support meaningful engagement. Children's rights and views are not strongly evident in day-to-day practice.

Illustrations of planning and assessment

'Very good' planning and assessment

Working with parents/carers, children, partners and colleagues, we gather a relevant range of information about children and their prior learning. We are highly skilled in observing and documenting children's significant learning and achievements. Together this robust assessment information provides reliable evidence about children. We use this to form a holistic picture of the child and make accurate judgements about children's progress and future learning.

Our approach to documenting learning empowers children to talk about their achievements and consider what they might learn next. Our planning for children's learning is both responsive and intentional to ensure an appropriate balance of child-led, adult-initiated and adult-directed experiences. We take account of children's ideas, interests and needs and use imaginative and appropriate ways to involve them in planning learning. We plan high-quality experiences that are relevant to children and families.

Our staff use assessment information with children and their parents/carers to plan appropriate next steps to help children continue to make progress and deepen their learning. Through talking together with colleagues within and beyond our setting, we have a shared understanding of children's progress and achievements as they grow and learn.

'Weak' planning and assessment

Our planning is not informed by a clear understanding of children's interests or the skills they are developing. There is an imbalance between intentional and responsive learning, and children are not meaningfully involved in planning their learning.

Our observations of children's learning do not accurately reflect individual children's skills. Assessment information is limited and does not support children, staff and parents/carers to reflect on children's progress or achievements. As a result, children's next steps in learning are not personalised, well-judged, appropriate or ambitious.

Illustrations of tracking and monitoring

'Very good' tracking and monitoring

Staff use very effective systems to monitor, record, evaluate and report on children's progress across the curriculum, including children who may experience barriers to their learning. We take into consideration the views of parents/carers, colleagues, and partners in this process. Parents/carers have a clear understanding of what is working well for their child and how they will be supported to make continued progress.

Our robust tracking systems demonstrate children's progress over time and identify where further support is required for individuals or groups of children. This data informs our planning to ensure we provide breadth, depth and challenge across the curriculum for all children. We monitor progress carefully to support children's learning to ensure interventions are having a positive impact.

'Weak' tracking and monitoring

Our systems to track and monitor children's learning do not accurately reflect the progress individual children make. We do not take full account of the views of children, parents/carers, colleagues or partners when identifying next steps in learning. The reliability and use of our data limits the impact of our interventions or additional support provided.

A lack of robust tracking, monitoring and moderation of children's progress results in our knowledge about children as learners being insufficient and inaccurate.

Challenge questions for learning, teaching and assessment

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- In what ways do we motivate and engage all children in their learning? How do we ensure high-quality learning is sustained?
- How well do we plan and manage transitions throughout a child's day?
- How do we ensure that we use a rights-based approach to learning, teaching and assessment? In what ways do children have the opportunity to be independent, responsible, and lead their own learning?
- How well do staff use high-quality interactions to support, challenge and extend children's thinking and learning?
- In what ways do we support children to make effective and creative use of digital technology to enhance their learning?
- In what ways do we use our assessment information to inform planning for children's learning? How effective are we at involving parents/carers?
- How well does the balance of intentional and responsive planning allow for breadth, depth, challenge and progress across the curriculum? In what ways do children influence planning to take their interests forward?
- How robust are our processes for tracking and monitoring to identify children's strengths, individual needs, or gaps in their experiences or learning?
- How well do staff and senior leaders use their robust discussions about children's learning to make sound judgements about their progress? How reliable is our professional judgement?

Nurturing care and support

Nurturing care and support is a Care Inspectorate quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Illustrations of nurturing care and support are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for nurturing care and support

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- nurturing care
- personal planning
- connections with families

About nurturing care and support

This indicator focuses on how well children are nurtured, cared for and supported. Children's care and learning routines are individualised to meet their needs and should be delivered with kindness and compassion.

There is a focus on personal planning that reflects the holistic needs of each child, promotes their wellbeing and supports positive outcomes. The indicator highlights the need to involve children and their families in making decisions about their care and support. Children transitioning between different spaces and settings require thoughtful consideration to ensure safe and supportive care.

This indicator highlights the importance of connecting with children and their families. Staff should create a welcoming environment and consider each child's unique circumstances to ensure smooth transitions and positive experiences. Fostering strong connections with children's families can have a significantly positive impact on a child's wellbeing.

Illustrations of nurturing care

'Very good' nurturing care

Our practice is built on the understanding that nurturing relationships are essential for children's growth and development. Children experience warm, consistent and responsive care that fosters their wellbeing. They are safe, sensitively cared for and skilfully helped to express their needs.

We recognise the importance of supportive transitions and understand that their significance can vary for each child. We regularly assess each child's individual needs and evaluate the effectiveness of our transition strategies. We ensure consistent relationships to support smooth transitions and minimise disruptions to children's care and learning experiences. Guided by best practice, such as Realising the ambition, we evaluate our approaches and continually strive to improve our practice. The varied age groups in the setting positively impact transitions because older children are encouraged to welcome, support and guide younger or newer children.

Children's privacy and dignity are respected. We balance promoting children's independence with providing support where it is needed. We continually reflect on our practice to ensure it adapts to children's evolving needs and development. We create diverse spaces that support children to socialise, play in small groups or alone if they wish. This positively impacts children's ability to regulate their emotions and build social skills.

Children's food choices are nutritious, culturally appropriate and safely prepared to account for any specific dietary needs, allergies or intolerances. They are aligned with current dietary guidelines including Setting the table and Food matters. Fresh water is readily available throughout the day. We consider daily routines, such as mealtimes, as valuable opportunities to promote children's involvement, independence and enhance their experiences.

We ensure consistency in who provides a child's care and support and how it is provided. Consistency in routines such as mealtimes, nap times and personal care provide our children with a sense of safety and security. We recognise these daily routines provide rich opportunities to connect with children and support their growth and development. We work closely with families and, when appropriate, children to administer medication safely. We

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are committed to the safety of all children and ensure our care and support approaches align with current best practice, guidance and policy.

'Weak' nurturing care

We do not respond appropriately to children's verbal and nonverbal communication. The rushed nature of interactions can lead to a tone and manner that conflicts with children's needs. This often results in children not seeking comfort or support from staff, compromising their wellbeing.

Our rigid approach to daily routines limits children's opportunities to build confidence and grow through their own experiences. Strategies for smooth transitions have not been developed or evaluated and do not meet the needs of individual children. They are not actively involved in planning routines or the experiences we offer, and their preferences and needs are often overlooked.

Continual changes to staffing arrangements disrupt children's routines and create a sense of instability. The frequent changes are challenging for some children, and we do not have the time or resources to support them. This often results in children being unsettled or distressed for long periods of time.

Food choices are not healthy. We do not plan meals and snacks in line with current nutritional guidance. We have limited understanding of children's individual cultural and dietary needs, making it challenging to keep them safe and respected. During mealtimes, we are focused on tasks, resulting in children receiving limited supervision and interaction to enhance their experience and keep them safe.

We limit children's access to water. We fail to recognise signs indicating a child might need a drink of water. Staff do not understand the importance of supporting children to stay hydrated.

Illustrations of personal planning

'Very good' personal planning

Children's wellbeing is supported through effective personal planning. All children, regardless of their personal characteristics, are recognised as capable individuals who are listened to, valued and respected. Personal plans promote children's rights and value the individuality of each child and their family.

Personal plans are tailored to each child's individual strengths, needs and interests. We create meaningful plans with children and regularly review these to ensure plans are suitable and supportive.

We work proactively with children, families and other professionals to identify support needs and have clear strategies in place to ensure that children's wellbeing is sustained. When a child requires support from multiple agencies, other professionals contribute to children's personal plans. Each child's personal plan is achievable, adaptable and includes strategies for care, support and protection, as necessary.

Our approach to personal planning considers best practice guidelines and is grounded in the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework, utilising wellbeing indicators to assess and plan for children's overall wellbeing. The indicators provide us with a common language for assessing and discussing children's strengths, needs and progress with families and other professionals.

A child-centred approach guides our strategies for transitions. We place children and families at the heart of any decision-making process. This includes when a child starts in our service or moves between services. Information to support continuity and progression in a child's care and support is shared appropriately, securely, and in good time. Staff use well-planned and flexible approaches to enable children to feel safe and secure with any changes.

'Weak' personal planning

Personal plans are not individualised or meaningful and do not effectively support us to meet the needs of each child. Children requiring additional support, whether short or long term, are not receiving adequate care. This has the potential to adversely impact children's development.

We place an overemphasis on what children cannot do and have limited consideration of their strengths and interests, leading to unrealistic and ineffective goals and strategies of support. Opportunities to work collaboratively with other professionals to achieve positive outcomes for children are missed. When we do collaborate, we do not effectively share information, update children's written plans or improve their care. This adversely impacts on the consistency and quality of care and support provided.

Personal plans do not comply with national guidance or legislation. We do not have opportunities to reflect on personal plans to help develop interactions, experiences and spaces to meet children's needs. This means opportunities to make children feel comfortable, safe and appropriately challenged are missed.

Approaches to transition do not consider the needs and views of individual children and families. This means we miss key information to help planning for any changes to care, support or experiences, resulting in distress and/or a sense of insecurity for some children.

We do not include the voices of children and families. This means their views have not been valued or used to plan for children. This contributes to a lack of continuity and consistency in children's care and support.

Serious inconsistencies in information sharing and record-keeping have put our children's safety at risk. Staff do not always have the information or knowledge needed to keep children safe, nurtured and supported. This has resulted in oversights, such as frequent errors in the timing or dosage of medication administration, jeopardising children's wellbeing.

Illustrations of connections with families

'Very good' connections with families

We know our children and families very well. We strive to create a warm and welcoming environment where children and families feel valued and supported. The care we provide children is deeply influenced by insights gained from their family. This supports us to create spaces which are culturally sensitive, accessible and inclusive for all.

Our connections with families increase their engagement in our service, positively impacting the quality of children's experiences. We recognise, learn from, and build upon the strengths that families bring, while sensitively responding to individual needs and circumstances. This collaborative approach enables us to learn from families, support children's growing sense of self, and ensure our setting remains responsive to their unique needs.

Families have regular opportunities to discuss their child's care and development, both informally and formally. We have systems in place to support communication with families, both verbally and in writing. We recognise and address many of the potential barriers that can make it difficult for families to be involved in our setting.

We understand that each child's development is shaped by their family, friends, community and experiences. We warmly welcome families into our setting to share in their child's experiences and encourage updates about children's hobbies and interests outside of our setting. This impacts positively on the quality of children's care and support, both at home and in the setting.

'Weak' connections with families

Engagement with families is not planned or purposeful. As a result, there is little evidence of the impact on, or benefits to, children's care or development. Our consultations with families fail to gather their views on what matters to them or their children. We rarely provide follow-up responses to requests for further information. As a result, many families feel unheard.

We place little value on building trusting relationships with families to improve children's wellbeing. Early opportunities to respond effectively to the needs of children and families are missed. This means that families are not always understood and treated with dignity and respect. Families tell us they do not feel welcome in our service.

We have limited understanding of the strengths and knowledge that families bring to our setting. We do not use the information they share with us to inform our care and support of children. This contributes to children feeling unsettled and can restrict their experiences.

There is a lack of quality feedback given to families across all aspects of their child's care and support. We have few informal interactions with families during key times such as, drop-off and pick-up of children. Opportunities for regular information exchanges are limited. We do not actively seek to build relationships with children's families. As a result, we miss opportunities to keep children safe and enhance their experiences.

Challenge questions for nurturing care and support

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- What best practice, theories and guidance underpin our care and support of children?
- How do our observations and knowledge of a child influence the routine of the day?
- Does our approach to transitions help children to feel safe and secure? How do we know our approach is effective?
- What systems, processes and approaches do we have in place to keep children safe? How do we know they are effective?
- What do we need to do to ensure that the voices of all children, both verbal and nonverbal, are heard and responded to?
- How do we know that all staff fully understand and implement our approaches to inclusion, diversity and equity?
- How well do staff understand and champion the rights of care experienced children and families?
- What do we do to promote sociable and healthy eating experiences?
- In what ways do we communicate with children, families and/or partner professionals to jointly plan children's care and support?
- When children and their families arrive at our setting, how do we know they feel welcomed?

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality is an HM Inspector quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Themes for wellbeing, inclusion and equality

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- positive relationships and wellbeing
- universal support
- Identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support
- inclusion and equality

About wellbeing, inclusion and equality

This quality indicator highlights the importance of positive relationships and children's wellbeing. It recognises the importance of providing high-quality, inclusive, and appropriate rights-based support. These approaches result in improved outcomes for children's learning, wellbeing and participation. It takes account of children who may require additional support to access and benefit fully from their entitlement to high-quality early learning and childcare (ELC). This includes identifying and assessing their learning and wellbeing needs in a timely manner and providing personalised and targeted support.

This quality indicator recognises that strong, collaborative partnership working between those supporting children is essential. It highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with children and families to inform decisions about how children's needs should be met.

This quality indicator emphasises the important role senior leaders play in ensuring all staff have relevant and worthwhile professional learning to meet the diverse and sometimes complex needs of children.

Illustrations of positive relationships and wellbeing

'Very good' positive relationships and wellbeing

We support children to understand and manage their emotions and behaviour in ways that promote positive relationships, engagement and inclusion. We understand fully that relationships lie at the heart of children's development and lay the foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. The wellbeing of children and families is paramount and is central to the work of our setting.

Relationships are based on respect, honesty and trust and getting it right to improve outcomes for children and families. We actively support our children to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. We can demonstrate the significant impact this has on our children's social, emotional, and mental wellbeing as well as their development and learning.

Each child is valued by staff as an individual with their own personality, views, needs, and rights. We actively encourage children's participation in a developmentally appropriate way. This enables children to communicate their views, in their own way, about their wellbeing and engage in decisions which affect them.

'Weak' Positive relationships and wellbeing

While relationships with children may be warm and friendly, we do not demonstrate a deep enough understanding of wellbeing, inclusion or equality. As a result, children are not consistently supported to feel safe, respected or included. Opportunities for children to express their views or participate in decisions that affect them are limited. This impacts their sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing.

Illustrations of universal support

'Very good' universal support

We provide all children with highly effective support and encouragement to ensure everyone is included. Inclusive practice is embedded across our universal provision, enabling children with additional support needs to access learning in a way that works for them. Almost all children participate fully and engage in exploration and play. They are supported by high-quality interactions, experiences, creative use of spaces, and technology.

Children's individual needs are at the centre of planning and review processes. We work with families and other important partners effectively to take full account of the diverse range of children's needs. We understand the positive impact highly effective collaborative working can have on children's experiences, and in the individual ways they learn.

Children have high-quality individualised learning and development targets, which build on prior learning. These are reviewed and evaluated regularly with children and their families and when required, other important partners, with appropriate next steps identified. There are strong collaborative partnerships with all those supporting children, including during key points of transition.

'Weak' Universal support

We are not confident in our responsibility to provide inclusive, rights-based early learning and childcare. Our provision does not offer all children equitable access to high-quality experiences.

We do not consistently plan or adapt learning to meet the needs of individual children. We do not use space or resources well enough to support participation and engagement. Partnerships with families and other professionals are limited, and this impacts our ability to provide well-informed, consistent support across the setting

Illustrations of identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support

'Very good' identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support

Children's individual learning needs are identified early through careful observation and effective analysis of robust assessment information from a range of sources. This includes working in close partnership with parents/carers and colleagues to take full account of children's prior learning and needs.

We make very effective use of the national wellbeing indicators to provide holistic assessment of children's strengths and support needs. We ensure that children with additional support needs are identified early and supported through well-planned, regularly reviewed interventions.

Staff are confident in using a range of inclusive strategies and resources to meet the diverse range of children's needs. We ensure appropriate, proportionate, and timely support, including specialist input where required.

Our senior leaders and staff adhere fully to legislative requirements. We provide high-quality targeted support to all children who require additional support, including access to digital technology, to reduce barriers to inclusion and learning.

Children, families and partners are fully involved in reviewing children's progress and making decisions about future learning and support. Targeted interventions are highly effective and lead to positive outcomes for children.

'Weak' identifying and assessing learning needs and targeted support

Our approach to identifying and assessing children's additional support needs is not yet sufficiently developed. We do not always use observation or assessment information effectively to build a holistic understanding of children's strengths and needs. As a result, targeted support is not consistently timely, proportionate or well matched to individual children.

We are not yet confident in how to meet legislative requirements, which means how we plan can lack clarity, impact or follow-through, limiting our ability to improve outcomes for children.

Illustrations for inclusion and equality

'Very good' inclusion and equality

Children and families are valued and treated with kindness, respect, and fairness at all times. We promote and support inclusion and children's rights and encourage all children to be fully involved in the life of the setting. Our staff make use of technology to enable every child to participate fully in an increasingly digital world and support involvement and engagement of families.

We value diversity and challenge discrimination. Our staff work in partnership with parents/carers and partners to promote and support diversity and enrich children's experiences.

Staff know all children and families very well. We understand the socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic context in which they live. Staff use this information to respond sensitively with well-timed support. This support takes account of the needs of children who are care experienced and the protected characteristics of all children and families. Highly effective strategies are in place to improve progress for all children with a clear focus on those facing challenges or barriers to their learning or inclusion.

'Weak' Inclusion and equality

We do not yet demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion and equality in the life and work of the setting. Children with additional support needs are not always fully included, and we are not taking effective action to reduce barriers to participation.

We do not always recognise or respond to discrimination, and we are not making effective use of data or local context to inform equitable practice.

Challenge questions for wellbeing, inclusion and equality

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- To what extent do our approaches to inclusion and equality positively impact on children's wellbeing?
- How well do we meet the needs of individual children, including those facing additional challenges? How effective is our approach to planning for children requiring additional support?
- How effectively do we involve parents/carers and partners in planning and delivering targeted support for individual children?
- In what ways do we engage children, parents/carers and partners in reviewing the impact of targeted support?
- In what ways do we support children at key points of transition to ensure continuity in wellbeing and inclusion?
- How effective are our approaches to improving outcomes for children? To what extent are these underpinned by getting it right for every child?
- How well is the UNCRC understood and embedded within our practice?
- To what extent do we have regular, high-quality professional learning to support wellbeing, inclusion and equality? What impact does this professional learning have?
- To what extent do we have a comprehensive and shared, understanding of our legislative duties to support all children?
- In what ways do we encourage children to explore the feelings, attitudes, values and beliefs that influence their lives in a developmentally appropriate way?
- To what extent does our practice create an ethos that ensures equality and celebrates diversity?

Children's progress

Children's progress is an HM Inspector quality indicator. There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to evaluate your current practice and identify areas for growth.

Themes for children's progress

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievements
- ensuring equity for all children

About children's progress

This quality indicator reflects the extent to which children are making meaningful progress in their learning and development over time. It focuses on the holistic nature of children's learning and development. It ensures these foundations are secure to achieve future success and attainment. It requires a clear and shared understanding of early learning pedagogy and child development, supported by strong pedagogical leadership. It reflects the integrated way children learn and the importance of high-quality interactions, experiences and spaces. It emphasises that high-quality early learning and childcare (ELC) contributes to closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all.

This quality indicator has a strong emphasis on the use of data and meaningful evidence to inform future planning and to report to parents/carers about their child's progress. It recognises the vital role of early learning and childcare in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and ensuring equity for all children.

Illustrations of children's progress over time

'Very good' children's progress over time

Within our setting children make very good progress across almost all aspects of their learning and development as a result of high-quality early learning experiences. From the earliest stages children are becoming increasingly confident, resilient, and independent learners. All children, including those with additional support needs are supported very well to make choices and share their learning and progress in their own individual way.

A strong focus on health and wellbeing enhances children's learning. Children develop and apply their early language and literacy, numerical and mathematical skills very well across a variety of meaningful play and real-life experiences. Children are confident to try new experiences across the curriculum as they gain knowledge and understanding of their world. They are supported to build on their prior experiences, develop new skills, and positive attitudes to learning.

Our staff make accurate professional judgements about significant learning and children's progress over time based upon a shared understanding of our robust evidence. Senior leaders play a key role in interpreting and using data with staff to inform future planning to secure positive outcomes for children. We work collaboratively with parents/carers, colleagues, and where appropriate, other professionals to agree and share information about children's progress.

'Weak' children's progress over time

We do not yet demonstrate a secure understanding of early learning pedagogy or child development. As a result, children do not make sufficient progress across aspects of their learning and development. While some children may show strengths, the experiences provided do not consistently build on prior learning or support sustained progress.

Children are not supported to develop confidence, independence or resilience. We do not consistently use professional judgement or evidence to understand and track children's progress over time.

Illustrations for overall quality of children's achievements

'Very good' overall quality of children's achievements

Children's individual successes are valued, recognised and celebrated routinely. Families feel empowered to share children's achievements and successes from outwith the setting. This information is used meaningfully to inform planning, enabling children to build on prior learning and make sustained progress.

Children are successful, confident and responsible learners who contribute effectively to the life of the setting, the wider community, and beyond. Our staff recognise and value all children's strengths. We use feedback and praise meaningfully to help children recognise and celebrate their achievements. Children are developing and achieve a range of relevant skills and attributes through engaging in a wide range of high-quality experiences across the curriculum.

'Weak' overall quality of children's achievements

Children's achievements are not consistently recognised, valued or used to inform learning. We do not routinely gather or use information about children's successes from outwith the setting. As a result, children are not supported to reflect on and celebrate their progress or apply what they have learned. They miss opportunities to develop a strong sense of self, understand their own capabilities, and build on their achievements.

We do not use feedback and praise effectively to help all children recognise what they have achieved or identify next steps in their learning. This limits their motivation, confidence, and ability to contribute meaningfully to the life of the setting or wider community.

Illustrations of ensuring equity for all children

'Very good' ensuring equity for all children

We take very good account of children's differing learning needs and the cultural, socio-economic and linguistic context in which they live. We use a range of data to enable us to respond sensitively with well-timed support, taking account of individual children and their family circumstances.

Based on robust evidence, we proactively plan and monitor a range of support to reduce and minimise where possible, potential barriers to learning and development. This includes children who are care experienced. We evaluate the impact of strategies to ensure they are leading to improved outcomes for all children.

Our consistent approach informs what needs to happen to ensure children continue to make progress in their learning and development. We work very effectively with partners, including parents/carers, to secure improved outcomes for children.

'Weak' ensuring equity for all children

We do not consistently take account of children's individual needs or the socio-economic, cultural or linguistic context in which they live. Our use of data is not robust enough to identify gaps or inform planning.

We do not demonstrate a clear understanding of how poverty impacts children's learning and development. As a result, support is not well-targeted or timely, and we do not take effective action to reduce barriers or close the poverty-related attainment gap. Our approach to building and sustaining partnerships with families and professionals is not effective. This limits our ability to improve outcomes for children.

Challenge questions for children's progress and achievement

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do we build on the skills and experiences children bring from home to ensure they make the best possible progress?
- In what ways do we ensure our interactions, experiences and spaces support children to make progress across almost all aspects of their learning
- How well do we use assessment information to identify the progress children make over time?
- In what ways can we demonstrate children's achievements, and the range of skills developed as a result of their ELC experience?
- How effectively do we share information on children's progress with families and relevant partner organisations, including colleagues working within and across the early level? How does this ensure children experience continuous and progressive learning?
- In what ways do we use contributions about children's achievements from families? How does this impact positively on children's progress? How effectively do we gather, analyse, and use data to inform future planning and to ensure equity for all?
- In what ways do we work with partners, including parents/carers, to ensure children have an equitable ELC experience? How is this supporting all children to make the best possible progress?

Safeguarding and child protection

Safeguarding and child protection is a Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland quality indicator. There are illustrations for practice and challenge questions below. As part of your self-evaluation, these themes can help your team reflect on your current practice and identify areas for development.

Illustrations are also available for childminding settings and school age childcare.

Themes for safeguarding and child protection

The themes for this quality indicator are:

- culture of safety and wellbeing
- legislation, policy and guidance in practice
- empowerment of staff and children

About safeguarding and child protection

This indicator relates to the range of responsibilities of leaders, staff and partners to ensure that children are safe, well cared for and protected from harm. It highlights the need for everyone to foster a culture that values, upholds, realises and promotes children's rights. There is an emphasis on the need to establish and maintain a shared commitment to promoting children's welfare and protection that is woven into the culture of safety, security and wellbeing.

It highlights the need for careful attention to children's wellbeing and safety as part of robust approaches to self-evaluation. It emphasises the need for a current understanding and implementation of relevant legislation, policy and guidance that is informed by high-quality, evidence-based professional learning. The indicator recognises the crucial importance of robust processes that underpin and direct staff to recognise, respond to, record and report wellbeing, child protection or safeguarding concerns appropriately.

This indicator focuses on the significance of building positive relationships and effective partnerships to safeguard children. It recognises the importance of supporting staff, children and families sensitively to learn about children's wellbeing and right to be safe and heard. It emphasises the need to ensure all children and staff are supported well to access the support they need, at the right time, to ensure children are protected.

Illustrations of culture of safety and wellbeing

'Very Good' culture of safety and wellbeing

Our ethos sensitively and effectively promotes children's rights and equality. This is supported by strong leadership that empowers all staff to continuously improve safeguarding and child protection practice across the setting. We understand our shared responsibility in ensuring that babies and children live safely and are supported to thrive.

Our leaders effectively support all staff to ensure we have a deep understanding of our shared responsibilities. We ensure any volunteers or covering staff are fully aware of our arrangements for safeguarding and child protection. We have a culture of accountability and continuous learning, driven by robust reflective practice. We understand that transitions for children, as part of daily routines or periods of significant change, can affect children in different ways. Our strong rights-based and trauma-informed practice ensures we anticipate and respond promptly and sensitively to safeguard children.

We understand the needs and experiences of children and families are varied. We prioritise fostering partnerships within our community and with families to ensure that we work well together to keep children safe. We proactively share information about available family supports that can offer early help in a sensitive way, to prevent escalating needs and risks to children.

'Weak' culture of safety and wellbeing

Our ethos does not effectively uphold or promote children's rights. Approaches which enable staff to actively listen to children and develop trusting relationships are not embedded. Children's views are not taken into consideration or respected. Children and families do not feel listened to.

Our leaders have not appropriately identified or addressed staff training needs related to wellbeing, safeguarding or child protection. Shared responsibility for continuous professional learning and self-reflection is not in place. When training is provided, we do not effectively apply new learning or update practice. Concerns that arise may not always be recognised or responded to in a timely or sensitive manner. We have not yet established consistent approaches to uphold children's rights to safety and protection.

Illustrations of legislation, policy and guidance in practice

'Very good' legislation, policy and guidance in practice

We have a comprehensive understanding of our safeguarding policies, which we apply consistently across our practice. Our team work closely to identify, record and respond to concerns effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are well implemented and monitored. We use our knowledge of best practice and internal procedures in areas such as recruitment and whistleblowing to keep children safe.

We are committed to protecting children from harm. We have well established and clear procedures that enable staff and volunteers to report concerns about a colleague or leader if they pose a risk to a child. Our policy and procedures empower everyone to escalate child protection issues that are not being handled appropriately.

Our robust approach to self-evaluation fully informs our arrangements for recognising, responding to, recording and reporting concerns about children's wellbeing or safety. We use legislation, national guidance and policies to support our self-evaluation. We proactively take account of new information, policy developments and emerging issues to improve our practice.

We have highly effective safeguarding and child protection processes to support our communication with other agencies. Our staff are confident in using these procedures. We have a clear understanding of our role and responsibility to keep children safe and when to share information with others.

Our proactive approach carefully considers the strengths, needs, risks and protective factors for individual children and their families. We pay particular attention to the unique needs of individual children, including those with additional support needs or who are care experienced. Our consistent application of clear procedures supports us very well in developing and sustaining effective partnerships. Children's and families' views fully inform our well-judged decisions and actions.

'Weak' legislation, policy and guidance in practice

Our limited understanding and ineffective implementation of national guidance mean that policies and legislation are not applied effectively. A lack of clearly defined roles and shared responsibilities in safeguarding and child protection has the potential to compromise children's safety and care.

Our safeguarding and child protection policies lack specific guidance on how to escalate concerns when someone in our team, including someone in a leadership role, may pose a risk to children. Policies are also unclear about what to do if a child protection issue is not being handled appropriately.

Our record-keeping practices are inconsistent and fail to adequately capture how different types of harm can create or heighten risk to a child. Opportunities to ensure support is in place, or appropriate action is taken, are missed. Agreed next steps are not consistently followed through, which limits improvements to children's wellbeing. Information required to keep children safe is not available to relevant staff or shared appropriately with partner agencies. These gaps may place children's safety and care at risk.

Illustrations empowering children and staff

'Very good' empowering children and staff

We apply a trauma-informed lens to all of our practice and interactions with children, their families and people within and outside of our team. We nurture trusting and respectful relationships with children, families and the local community. Our interactions are underpinned by children's rights. We know individual children very well. We communicate respectfully with families and one another to develop a holistic knowledge of children and their wellbeing needs. This enables us to identify children and families who may be at risk of harm and respond appropriately.

We are a highly skilled team with a deep understanding of safeguarding and child protection practice, which we use to create a safe and trusting environments for all. Children feel secure in expressing their views, sharing worries and asking for help. We prioritise listening with sensitivity and responding with care. This is supported by an empowering and empathetic leadership team that values staff wellbeing and encourages openness.

We regularly provide motivating opportunities where children assess and manage appropriate risk and learn about how to keep safe. Through our responsive interactions and well-judged support, we help children build skills and learn to keep themselves safe. Children develop their resilience and their understanding of physical and emotional safety very well.

Our thoughtful approaches support families well to learn about safeguarding and children's rights within our setting. This includes high-quality opportunities for children and parents/carers to develop their cyber resilience and internet safety skills.

'Weak' empowering children and staff

We do not consistently understand or respect the different ways children communicate their views and experiences. We rarely notice what children express through words or actions. As a result, important signs that a child may need protection from harm or support may not be identified or acted upon.

Our team lack a consistent approach to understanding and respecting the different ways children communicate their views and experiences. We rarely notice what children express through their actions, as well as their words. As a result, important signs that a child may need protection or support may not be identified or acted upon.

We do not recognise our role in supporting children to build resilience. Stable, consistent routines are undervalued. Frequent staff changes and inconsistent approaches can make it difficult for children to form secure, trusting relationships with staff.

We do not consistently demonstrate a working knowledge of safeguarding or child protection practices. We are not encouraged or supported to be proactive in recognising, responding to, reducing, or removing potential harm to children. Clear processes for escalating concerns are not in place or not implemented consistently.

Challenge questions safeguarding and child protection

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do leaders and staff implement national guidance and take account of legislation to keep children safe, secure and protected from harm?
- To what extent do our relationships with children, staff, families, partners and the local community promote children's welfare and safety?
- How well do our self-evaluation and quality assurance processes support improvements in safeguarding? To what extent do they strengthen areas such as staff and volunteer recruitment, personal planning and practice in place to keep children safe.
- To what extent does regular, high-quality, professional learning improve our practice?
- What changes have we made as a result of professional learning? How do we know practice changes have had a positive impact for children and/or staff?
- How effectively do we identify and support children at risk of harm, including those who are on, or were previously on, the child protection register?
- How effectively do we identify and support children who are care experienced and living with kinship, foster or adoptive families or in residential care?
- How well do we use risk assessment tools, such as chronologies, to inform our actions and improve outcomes for children and families?
- What evidence tells us that we are effectively using a trauma-informed approach?
- How effectively do staff support children, parents/carers and one another to develop their cyber resilience and internet safety skills?
- How well do our child protection policies and procedures support us to keep children safe from harm? How effectively do staff support children to learn how to recognise and manage risk as they play and learn?
- How well are staff's wellbeing needs recognised and supported within your child protection practice?

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The quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors is also available online.