



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

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Introduction

This self-evaluation framework supports quality improvement in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings. It can be used by all early learning and childcare (ELC) services. This includes childminders and school-aged childcare providers. The Care Inspectorate and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) will use the framework for the inspection of settings.

This rights-based framework provides a holistic approach to assessing care, play and education. It contains quality indicators (QIs), which support reflection. These can help you identify practices that work and areas that need improvement.

At the heart of the Care Inspectorate and HMIE's work is ensuring that children are:

- safe and protected from harm
- cared for and able to thrive
- offered high-quality learning and development opportunities

The Care Inspectorate and HMIE will use the framework to work with ELC services and sector-wide bodies to build the capacity for self-evaluation.

Framework quality indicators

Quality indicators (QIs) will help you to evaluate performance at every level. You should use evaluations from all areas to consider opportunities for improvement. Quality indicators will help you to understand the difference you are making, what you need to do next, and how to make positive changes.

The QIs are grouped under four important headings:

- leadership
- children thrive and develop in quality spaces
- children play and learn
- children are supported to achieve

The framework offers QIs for the following sectors:

Early learning and childcare

The QIs for ELC should be used for all provision types, except for childminding and school-aged childcare services.

Childminding

Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate agree that childminders who deliver funded or non-funded care should self-evaluate against the quality indicators found within the childminding-specific content. This means that childminders providing funded care do not need to self-evaluate against any additional quality indicators from elsewhere in the wider framework or other sector specific content.

Childminders delivering school aged childcare can also self-evaluate their service using the quality indicators within the childminding sector specific content.

School-aged childcare

The QIs for school-aged childcare should be used by services providing out-of-school care.

Principles of this framework

The framework is underpinned by the principles of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). We are committed to ensuring that children grow up loved, safe and respected.

Children's rights are central to every aspect of their care, play, learning and education. Every child should be loved, safe, respected, and supported to achieve their potential.

UNCRC principles

This framework considers four general principles of children's rights:

Non-discrimination: children are protected from discrimination and treated fairly.

Best interests of the child: when making any decision, adults must do what is best for children rather than themselves. This includes governments and businesses.

Survival and development: children must be supported to grow up into what they want to be without harmful interference.

Respect for children's views: children have opinions that must be taken into account in all the things they care about.

National standards

Every setting is required to meet [The Health and Social Care Standards](#). We are also dedicated to keeping [The Promise](#) and [The Pinky Promise](#) made to care-experienced people and their families.

The self-evaluation process

The framework contains quality indicators that focus on specific areas of practice. They will help you identify strengths in the ways you are currently working. They will also highlight ways to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Self-evaluation will help you explore your progress, development, and practice. The self-evaluation process uses evidence to reflect on achievements. It will also help you develop action plans for improvement.

The process of self-evaluation is part of a wider quality assurance approach. It requires a cycle of reflection based on the following three questions:

1. How are we doing?
2. How do we know?
3. What are we going to do now?

It is important for self-evaluation to be manageable. You should consider which areas you wish to assess and why. Use evidence to support your analysis.

Self-evaluation can also be a forward-looking assessment. Consider any factors that might affect your ability to improve. Such factors might include staff changes, restructuring, or funding cuts.

Roles and responsibilities of inspectors

The Care Inspectorate has statutory obligations under section 53 of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 to carry out inspections of all ELC and school-aged childcare settings that are registered with them.

The Care Inspectorate will inspect all children's services whether or not the setting delivers the funded entitlement for ELC. The aim of inspection is ensuring all children, whatever their age or setting type, have the highest quality care, play and learning experiences.

HM Inspectors of Education have powers to inspect schools and educational establishments under section 66 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. This includes powers to inspect 'nursery schools' and other settings that are providing funded ELC to children, which may be nursery or childminding settings. HMIE support improvement and provide public accountability and assurance on the quality of education to children, their parents/carers and Scottish Ministers.

Inspections of education are carried out by His Majesty's Inspectors. Excellence, equity and steps to close the poverty-related attainment gap remain important priorities of their work. The work of HM Inspectors is underpinned by the drive to ensure that every child experiences high-quality education.

As well as providing assurance, HM Inspectors share evidence and innovative practice about education to support services to improve and inform the development of educational policy and practice.

Both inspectorates will retain their current roles and responsibilities. The Care Inspectorate will continue to inspect all ELC settings, including childminders and school-aged childcare settings, whether or not they provide funded ELC. Education Scotland will inspect settings providing funded ELC (other than childminders).

Inspection

Both the Care Inspectorate and HMIE will use the framework for the inspection of ELC. This includes inspections they undertake independently of each other and when they work together as part of a shared inspection of ELC.

Having a shared framework will enable both organisations to work more closely together, using their professional expertise to evaluate the quality of the care and education.

The Care Inspectorate will apply this framework within their inspection and regulatory role to ensure all elements of funded or unfunded ELC, childminding and school aged childcare receive the highest standards of care and learning.

HMIE inspections will continue to evaluate the quality of children's educational experiences and major changes in the education system. The framework has distinct quality indicators for the inspection of education. HMIE will use these quality indicators to inspect settings providing funded ELC (other than childminders).

The Care Inspectorate has core assurances that they inspect against at every inspection. An element of the core assurances is safeguarding. HMIE will continue with their safeguarding arrangements as part of their inspections.

Both organisations will continue to promote a culture of self-evaluation and quality improvement.

Grading criteria

The six-point scale is a tool for evaluating the quality indicators. It is used by His Majesty's Inspectorate, and the Care Inspectorate for reporting on the outcomes of inspections. Local authorities and other governing bodies may choose to use it for the purpose of national and/or local benchmarking across a number of settings.

It is not necessary for individual settings to measure themselves against the six-point scale although they may choose to do so to help assess and understand their performance.

The Care Inspectorate will retain the term 'adequate' for the time being, in order to align with the National Standard and Education Scotland will retain the term 'satisfactory'. Where an adequate evaluation has been made, the Care Inspectorate will revisit the service in the following inspection year.

Level 6 'excellent': outstanding or sector leading

An excellent grading means that this aspect of the setting's work is outstanding and sector leading. The experiences and achievements of all children are of a very high quality.

This represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice. It is based on achieving equity and inclusion.

Settings show a deep professional understanding which is worth sharing to support system-wide improvement. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.

Level 5 'very good': major strengths

'Very good' means that there are major strengths in this aspect of the setting's work. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish children's experiences.

An evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision for all children and is a standard that should be achievable by all.

There is an expectation that the setting will make continued use of self-evaluation to plan further improvements and will work towards improving provision and strive to raise performance to excellent.

Level 4 'good': important strengths with areas for improvement

An evaluation of good means that there are important strengths within the setting's work yet there remain some aspects which require improvement.

The strengths have a significantly positive impact on almost all children. The quality of experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required.

The setting should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, and also take action to address the areas for improvement.

Level 3 'satisfactory/ adequate': strengths just outweigh weaknesses

An evaluation of satisfactory means that strengths in this aspect of the work outweigh the weaknesses. It indicates that children have access to a basic level of provision.

Strengths have a positive impact on children's experiences. Weaknesses are not important enough to have an adverse impact. They do constrain the quality of children's experiences.

Satisfactory or adequate performance may be tolerable in particular circumstances. For example, where a service or partnership is not yet established, or are in the midst of major transition. Continued performance at satisfactory/adequate level is not acceptable.

Improvements build on strengths. They should address elements that do not contribute to positive experiences and outcomes for children.

Level 2 'weak': important weaknesses

An evaluation of weak means that there are some strengths but there are important weaknesses within this aspect of the setting's work.

These weaknesses, either individually or collectively, are sufficient to diminish children's experiences. Improvements should be made as a matter of priority. Without improvement the welfare or safety of children may be compromised, or their critical needs not met.

Weak performance requires action. Structured and planned improvement must be made by the provider or partnership. This should demonstrate clearly that sustainable improvements have been made.

Level 1 'unsatisfactory': major weaknesses

An evaluation of unsatisfactory will apply when there are major weaknesses in critical aspects of performance which require immediate remedial action to improve experiences and outcomes for children. It is likely that children's welfare or safety will be compromised by risks which cannot be tolerated.

Those accountable for carrying out the necessary actions for improvement must do so, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that children are protected, and their wellbeing improves without delay.

In almost all cases, this will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This will usually involve working alongside other staff in other settings or agencies.

Using this self-evaluation framework

Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate will begin to use the new framework for inspection from September 2025.

This framework replaces both [How good is our early learning and childcare](#) and [A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare](#).

There will be a transition period as settings move away from using the existing frameworks. This will allow settings to become familiar with its content and structure.

You may continue to use the existing framework until you are ready to adopt the new framework.

Both inspectorates will engage with settings to support them to become familiar and confident in using the new framework for self-evaluation.

The final version of the framework will be formally launched in autumn 2025.

With help from stakeholders, we have compiled some [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#). Answers address some of the points raised with us so far. We will keep these FAQs updated as new questions arise.

The structure of the framework

The quality indicators for early learning and childcare (ELC) are grouped under four important headings:

Leadership

The quality indicators for leadership are:

- [leadership and management of staff and resources](#)
- [staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment](#)
- [leadership of continuous improvement](#)

Children thrive and develop in quality spaces

The quality indicator for children thrive and develop in quality spaces is [children experience high quality spaces](#).

Children play and learn

The quality indicators for children play and learn are:

- [play and learning](#)
- [curriculum](#)
- [learning, teaching and assessment](#)

Children are supported to achieve

The quality indicators for supporting children to achieve are:

- [nurturing care and support](#)
- [wellbeing, inclusion and equality](#)
- [children's progress](#)
- [safeguarding and child protection](#)

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'.

There will be a 'weak' illustration for some quality indicators, where appropriate.

Leadership and management of staff and resources

Leadership and management of staff and resources is a Care Inspectorate 'leadership' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess 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-aged childcare](#).

Themes for leadership and management of staff and resources

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This 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 focus on how policy, guidance, legislation, the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and the [Health and Social Care Standards](#) are used to ensure that each child is protected, safe and receives the right support and care from staff.

Illustrations for 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.

Our 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 childcare 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 effectively 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 for 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 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.

Our 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. Our experience may be 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. Children's experiences and outcomes are poor, as inconsistencies in practice are not fully identified and do not highlight areas for improvement.

Illustrations for staff recruitment and induction

'Very good' staff recruitment and induction

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

Our staff are recruited in a way that has been informed by all aspects of safer recruitment practices. We understand our responsibility to ensure any temporary staff are safely recruited and that they understand their responsibilities within the staff group. There is a strong emphasis on values-based recruitment, ensuring successful candidates' values reflect those of the setting.

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 in the team who may be caring for their children.

We have induction programmes that are thorough and personalised to meet the different roles of staff. They ensure staff are confident in meeting the needs of individual children. We utilise a range of resources, including the ['Early learning and childcare: 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, disciplinary records or staff start working before all the required checks have been undertaken or received.

Our induction process is not planned to take account of staff who are new to their role and their ongoing learning and development. Induction may be limited to a one-off event, focusing on policies and procedures, with little consideration of the care, play and learning needs of children.

Staff are unclear about what is expected of them and may lack knowledge of how the UNCRC and the Health and Social Care Standards underpin the provision.

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 management of staff and resources

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do we collaborate with children, families and other stakeholders in developing a shared vision and purpose?
- To what extent is our vision aspirational and challenging?
- 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 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 'leadership' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth. Illustrations of staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment are also available for [childminding settings](#) and [school-aged childcare](#).

Themes for staff skills, knowledge, values and deployment

The themes for this QI are:

- staff skills, knowledge and values
- staff deployment

About this quality indicator

This 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 and flourish.

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 adult and peer contact for children, while providing a safe, high-quality service to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Illustrations for 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 UNCRC and the Health and Social Care Standards are used in this process.

A wide range of opportunities is available for staff to hold professional discussions, and 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 do occur. Where required, staff maintain a 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.

Illustrations for 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, staff 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 staff have the appropriate level of support from experienced colleagues to support their developing skills and knowledge.

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:

- What evidence do we have that our professional learning is increasing our knowledge and understanding and improving outcomes for children and families?
- How confident are we at building on individual skills and interests which lead to improvements for children?
- How do we engage and encourage leadership at all levels when promoting play and learning in our setting?
- How do we know that staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to support children to be the best that they can be?
- 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 Education Scotland 'leadership' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth. There are no 'weak' illustrations for this QI.

Themes for leadership of continuous improvement

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This indicator relates to leadership of improvements that are ambitious and reflect the views and aspirations of all stakeholders. 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 up to date research. It highlights the impact of effective leadership of learning at all levels which improves pedagogy, educational outcomes and equity for all.

Illustrations for pedagogical leadership

'Very good' pedagogical leadership

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

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

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

Illustrations for leadership and professional learning

'Very good' leadership and professional learning

Through highly effective leadership at all levels, we consistently achieve high standards in our work. We motivate, support and inspire others to continually improve their pedagogy and practice.

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 based on high quality self-evaluation. This enables us to reflect on, develop and improve our knowledge, understanding and pedagogy to provide high-quality early learning and childcare.

The resulting knowledge gained is used very well to influence and support pedagogy and practice to meet the needs of all children. Professional learning and development enhance the setting's improvement priorities with a very positive impact on outcomes for children.

Illustrations for planning and continuous improvement

'Very good' planning and continuous improvement

Our clear co-created vision for change and our 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 purposeful self-evaluation involves all staff, children and stakeholders.

There are clear plans for improvement with specific, measurable targets to support the implementation of change. Senior leaders guide and manage the direction and pace of change successfully.

Highly effective strategies are used to monitor and evaluate the impact of change and inform future actions. All those involved with the setting are clear about improvements and the impact on the quality of early learning and childcare.

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 and improvements?
- How well do we support one another, share practice and take responsibility for improving our pedagogy?
- In what ways do we use robust self-evaluation to make decisions about professional learning and improvement?
- How well does professional learning impact positively on outcomes for children and in what ways?
- To what extent do our approaches support children, staff and stakeholders to share their views, experiences and opinions to influence change?
- How effectively do we engage others to develop a shared vision and purpose for our setting?
- How well does the setting's vision and values underpin the work of the setting? What impact do they have on improving the quality of education and care we provide?

Children experience high quality spaces

Children experience high quality spaces is the Care Inspectorate's 'children thrive and develop in quality spaces' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth. Illustrations for children experience high quality spaces are also available for [childminding settings](#) and [school-aged childcare](#).

Themes for children experience high quality spaces

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This 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, interests and their differing engagement with play and learning. These inclusive spaces recognise and celebrate diversity. Staff consider and build upon current research and best practices, such as ['Space to grow and thrive: Design guidance for early learning and school-aged childcare settings'](#) and ['Realising the ambition: Being me'](#) when designing and evaluating spaces for children.

There is a 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, highlighting the need for regular maintenance of the building, 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 a recognition that children and staff should be fully involved in taking a benefit-risk approach to play and learning experiences. All aspects of security should be considered, including the security of buildings and the storage of confidential records and information.

Illustrations for 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 for learning. As a result, our physical environment has been designed to empower children to actively experience play and learning, centred on their needs and interests.

We understand and uphold the rights of all children to play and learn. This includes recognising 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 embrace a benefit-risk approach with children where appropriate. This enables children to engage in a broad range of interesting play opportunities to challenge and extend their development and learning, as well as building self-confidence to develop skills for life.

We work well together to minimise risks to children, both indoors and outdoors. Prompt action is taken by all staff to ensure the safety and security of children, visitors and each other. All staff understand and share appropriate risk assessments. Children are accounted for as our staff are vigilant whether 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 ([Keeping children safe: Practice notes](#)).

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, 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 monitoring, maintenance and repair of the setting, equipment, and any vehicles, function well and are consistently implemented. Damaged items are promptly replaced.

'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's play and learning.

Children's views do not sufficiently influence their access to outdoors. Current best practice or research is not used effectively to inform our knowledge in this area. We do not always recognise when children need more energetic experiences. Potential barriers to 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 for children influence and affect change

'Very good' illustrations for 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.

Our physical environment provides very good opportunities for children to be independent and make choices. Children are engrossed and motivated in their play and are progressing well in all aspects of their learning and development.

We understand the positive impact that rich, multi-sensory play and learning has on children's resilience, health and wellbeing. Appropriate resources and materials support children's play, learning and interests.

Children have control over what they do and how they play. We provide opportunities for children to learn about sustainability and caring for their natural environment.

Resources are adaptive and responsive to children's differing emotions and interests. These promote interesting opportunities to develop learning in literacy, numeracy and across a broad range of learning outcomes.

We understand and promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the provision of high-quality resources and spaces. Children, their families and communities are positively reflected in the resources, spaces and experiences available, promoting a sense of inclusion and wellbeing. This means all children feel included and are developing their knowledge, respect and understanding of difference.

'Weak' illustrations for 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 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 exploration.

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

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 and carers to deepen their understanding of the benefits of riskier outdoor play and learning experiences.

Illustrations for 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 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, and to be able to explore their ideas?
- To what extent does the physical environments 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 support health and wellbeing across all spaces for children?
- How well are children enabled to select and make use of high-quality resources appropriate to their wishes, development and learning needs?
- How inclusive is our setting for all children and families? Does it accommodate and promote emotional safety?
- Does our setting facilitate and support understanding of difference and diversity for all children? How do we know?
- How are children's files and information stored to ensure they are secure?
- Do we demonstrate an understanding of how data protection laws operate?

Play and learning

Play and learning is a Care Inspectorate 'children play and learn' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth. Illustrations of play and learning are also available for [childminding settings](#) and [school-aged childcare](#).

Themes for play and learning

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This indicator focuses on children's right to play, demonstrating that they should have fun, experience joy and have high-quality 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 should recognise the value of play as an opportunity for developing 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. Recognition is given to the value of staff skilfully interacting and playing with children to encourage and extend children's thinking skills. Children are supported to recognise, enjoy and celebrate their successes.

Illustrations for children's engagement

'Very good' children's engagement

Children are successful, responsible and confident in their play as a result of high-quality experiences we offer. They are highly motivated and fully engaged by the range of rich, challenging, planned and spontaneous experiences both indoors and outdoors.

Well-considered innovations and creative approaches successfully engage children's imagination and enrich their play and learning. Their skills in language, literacy and numeracy are enhanced through play and learning experiences.

We work effectively with families to support their understanding of the benefits to children of play and 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 leading their play and learning within an enabling, challenging and creative environment. They have time, space and support to make decisions and develop their learning, creativity, resilience and independence.

Children's interests are extended and sustained through the use of high-quality interactions, experiences and spaces. This includes developing strong connections to their own and wider communities.

'Weak' children's engagement

Children have limited opportunities to lead their play and learning or to influence the range of spaces and experiences available to them. The play and learning environment lacks inspiration. There is little to challenge or ignite children's imagination and curiosity, or to encourage them to explore their ideas.

Children's individual development needs and their interests are not reflected within the 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, distress or frustration.

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

Illustrations for quality of interactions

'Very good' quality of interactions

We have a very good understanding of how children learn and progress. Our staff make use of relevant theory and practice, and skilfully use this to support high quality play and learning experiences. We support the emotional resilience of children through holistic and nurturing approaches to secure children's wellbeing, including the right to play.

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 using concepts such as sustained shared thinking, wondering aloud and by engaging in meaningful conversations. 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, practice 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 understand when to engage and when to stand back and observe. We encourage children's interactions with each other and take account of interactions that take place through actions, including verbal and nonverbal communications. This enables children to make the most of interactions, experiences and the physical environment for their learning and development.

'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 recognise children's emergent 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, distressed or frustrated in their learning.

Our staff are not child-focused in interactions and fail to recognise and value children's thoughts, interests and processes during play. Observations of children's play do not facilitate the identification of next steps to support the child's interests, support needs or developmental needs.

We may be focused on only one or two elements of children's learning and not reflect a true, holistic picture of where each child is in terms of social, emotional, physical or cognitive development. As a result, children are not supported to extend their play and learning and the need for support, reassurance or intervention may be missed.

Illustrations for child-centred planning and assessment

'Very good' child-centred planning and assessment

Children are at the centre of all planning for play and learning. We are skilled in recognising the different stages in children's play and learning. 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 spontaneous 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 to inform experiences and to support children to enjoy their successes and share their achievements in play and learning.

'Weak' child-centred planning and assessment

Opportunities to observe and assess children in their everyday play are missed, leading to gaps in understanding around their interests and overall development. We either do not have, or do not use, information needed to effectively respond and plan to meet children's individual needs and interests, including additional supports where required. As a result, some children are not experiencing appropriate opportunities to support and consolidate their own learning through play and are not sufficiently challenged at an appropriate 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 play and learning

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/others?
- How do we maximise opportunities for children to be challenged, creative and engaged in their play and learning?

Curriculum

Curriculum is an Education Scotland 'children play and learn' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practices and identify areas for growth. There are no 'weak' illustrations for this QI.

Themes for curriculum

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

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

All children are entitled to a coherent curriculum offering opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they will need to thrive, flourish and achieve in today's world. The responsive curriculum supports progression in children's learning as they enter the setting and at [key points of transition](#). Relevant partnerships enrich the curriculum through meaningful learning experiences indoors, outdoors and within their community.

Illustrations for 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.

We have a very good understanding of pedagogy, which is evident in the implementation of our curriculum.

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

Our purpose is clear and understood by staff, children, families and partners. We take full account of the four contexts for learning in our curriculum design.

We ensure challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance. Our curriculum is highly responsive to the uniqueness of each child, their family and the context of their community.

Local and national guidance and current evidence-based research influence and inform us as we review and refresh our curricular approaches.

Illustrations for continuity and progression in the curriculum

'Very good' continuity and progression in the curriculum

Our curriculum, which is co-created with stakeholders, supports continuity and progression in learning across all curricular areas. We very effectively build on the prior and continuous learning of all children to shape our curriculum.

Our staff use robust processes 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 [transition programmes](#) are highly effective in building on prior learning to support curriculum continuity and progression.

Illustrations for 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 to support the design and implementation of our curriculum.

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 understand the role they play and are empowered to contribute to our curriculum.

We engage very effectively with parents and support all types of family learning. We actively involve stakeholders in a range of meaningful ways to plan and deliver exciting and engaging opportunities across the curriculum.

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, and an awareness of the world in which they live and grow. Our children are developing a broad range of skills within motivating and relevant contexts.

Children ask questions, consider and make connections across learning experiences to make sense of and care for the world around them. Technologies support children to develop essential skills for life and learning, which enable them to explore and learn more about the world beyond their immediate experience.

Our nurturing approaches ensure that children develop positive attitudes towards change and show determination to succeed in chosen experiences. Our children increasingly demonstrate eagerness and capacity to initiate and participate in improvements to our setting and community.

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 current 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 children?
- In what way are we ensuring the curriculum is rights-based, responsive and play-based?
- In what ways do we share the purpose of our curriculum with children, parents, staff and partners?
- What difference does our curriculum make to our practice and pedagogy?
- How do we ensure continuity and progression in the curriculum within and across the early level.
- How effectively do we collaborate with parents and colleagues to ensure continuity?
- To what extent does the curriculum take account of and respond to potential barriers in learning?
- In what way do partnerships enhance and impact positively on the design and implementation of the curriculum?
- In what ways does our curriculum foster creativity, enterprise, sustainability, equality and children's skills for life and learning?

Learning, teaching and assessment

Learning, teaching and assessment is an Education Scotland 'children play and learn' quality indicator (QI).

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practices and identify areas for growth. There are no 'weak' illustrations for this QI.

Themes for learning, teaching and assessment

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This indicator focuses on how children benefit from access to high quality spaces and purposefully engage in a wide range of interesting experiences. It demonstrates the importance of a high level of skill and clear understanding of early years pedagogy, the concept of play, child development and children's rights.

Learning, teaching and assessment highlights the importance of observing and interacting sensitively with children and planning and assessing their learning. It recognises the importance of involving children fully in planning their play and learning in the setting, outdoors and in the local community.

This QI also highlights the importance of robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress for practitioners to know children very well as learners.

Illustrations of children's experiences and spaces

'Very good' children's experiences and spaces

Our staff make very good use of the indoor and outdoor spaces and local community to provide high quality, real-life experiences for children. Children's wellbeing and developmental needs are met very well through carefully considered spaces and experiences.

Our children are highly confident and use the available spaces very well to meet their changing developmental needs. Throughout the setting there are stimulating spaces where children explore, experiment, and develop curiosity and creativity.

Children access attractive well-planned spaces where they develop high levels of independence and can rest and be calm. Their ideas, opinions and involvement are respected and acted upon when spaces are being developed.

Children use a wide variety of technology meaningfully to develop and extend their learning. We involve children purposefully in planning and evaluating their learning spaces and experiences.

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. Respectful relationships and children's rights are at the heart of all our interactions.

Our staff listen carefully to children's views and are attuned to their needs, interests and learning styles. Our staff are skilled at knowing when to step back and observe and when to use well-considered questions, commentary and modelling to support, deepen and extend their learning.

We make highly effective use of technology to enrich our learning and teaching. Our high-quality interactions ensure children have the time and space to explore their interests and develop their skills. We value their opinions and support all children to have a voice. We interact sensitively with parents and involve them in all aspects of their child's learning.

Illustrations of planning and assessment

'Very good' planning and assessment

We have a very clear understanding of how children learn and develop and know each individual child very well. Our staff are highly responsive to children and plan exciting experiences with them that encourage the development of curiosity, inquiry and creativity. Staff plan an appropriate balance of child and adult-led experiences that respond meaningfully to the changing needs and interests of all children.

Children are fully involved in planning and can talk about what they are learning. Parents are consulted and involved meaningfully in planning and supporting their child's learning. Experiences are relevant to children and develop their interests across all areas of the curriculum. We are highly skilled at observing and assessing children's learning and identifying their next steps.

Our staff use assessment information with children and their parents to plan appropriate experiences to help children to 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.

Illustrations of tracking and monitoring

'Very good' tracking and monitoring

Staff use very effective systems to monitor, record, evaluate and report on progress across all areas of the curriculum. We involve children and parents meaningfully in this process.

Our robust tracking systems inform our pedagogy and ensure we provide breadth, depth and balance across the curriculum for all children. We monitor planned interventions carefully to ensure they are having a positive impact on children's learning and development.

Parents have a clear understanding of what is working well for their children and how they will be supported to make continued progress.

Challenge questions for learning, teaching and assessment

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How does our pedagogy influence our interactions, experiences and spaces?
- How well do staff involve children and families to review and adapt spaces indoors and outdoors to impact positively on children's wellbeing and learning?
- How do staff use the community and spaces beyond the setting to extend children's learning?
- How do staff enhance spaces to support children's wellbeing and facilitate their creativity, thinking and independence?
- In what ways do spaces and resources allow children to apply skills, including digital skills, in relevant and meaningful ways?
- How do staff use interactions to support, challenge and extend children's thinking and learning?
- In what ways do staff use technology to support children's thinking and learning?
- In what ways do children influence planning to take their interests forward?
- How well does observation, interpretation and documentation support staff to plan experiences, which are suitably challenging to meet children's wellbeing and learning needs?
- How robust are our processes for tracking and monitoring learning to identify children's strengths, individual needs or gaps in their experiences or learning?
- How well do staff 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 (QI) for 'supporting children to achieve'.

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practices and identify areas for growth. Illustrations of nurturing care and support are also available for [childminding settings](#) and [school-aged childcare](#).

Themes for nurturing care and support

The themes for this QI are:

- nurturing care
- personal planning
- connections with families

About this quality indicator

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: Being me](#),' 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 our children's ability to regulate their emotions and build social skills.

Our children's food choices are nutritious, culturally appropriate and aligned with current dietary guidelines. For example, [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.

Official

We work closely with families and, when appropriate, children to [administer medication safely](#). We 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 our staff, compromising their wellbeing.

Our rigid approach to daily routines limits children's opportunities to build confidence and grow through their own experiences. 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.

When meals or snacks are provided, there is little involvement of children in the planning or preparation. We are busy during mealtimes and do not have time to sit with children to supervise them or enhance the experience.

We limit children's access to water. We regularly 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. Our 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 our 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 the 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 our 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.

Staff avoid informal interactions with our families during key times such as, drop-off and pick-up of children. Opportunities for regular information exchanges with families are limited. By not actively seeking to build strong relationships with children's families, we miss opportunities to keep children safe and/or to enhance their care and experiences.

Challenge questions for nurturing care and support

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- What best practices, 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 Education Scotland quality indicator (QI) for 'supporting children to achieve'.

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practices and identify areas for growth. There are no 'weak' illustrations for this QI.

Themes for wellbeing, inclusion and equality

The themes for this QI are:

- positive relationships and wellbeing
- universal support
- identification of learning needs and targeted support
- inclusion and equality

About this quality indicator

This indicator highlights the importance of relationships and children's wellbeing. It recognises the importance of providing high-quality, inclusive and appropriate rights-based support.

This QI takes full account of children who may require additional support to access and benefit fully from their entitlement to high-quality early learning and childcare. This includes identifying their learning needs in a timely manner and providing targeted support.

This QI recognises that strong, collaborative partnership working between those supporting children is essential. It highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with children and families. This informs decisions about how their needs should be met.

This QI recognises the important role senior leaders play in ensuring all staff have relevant and worthwhile professional learning to meet the diverse needs of children.

Illustrations for positive relationships and wellbeing

'Very good' positive relationships and wellbeing

We understand fully that positive 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 with children and families are based on respect, honesty and trust and getting it right to improve outcomes for children and families.

We actively promote and support our children to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. We can show the positive 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 and views in a developmentally appropriate way, which allows them to talk about their wellbeing and engage in decisions which affect them.

Illustrations for universal support

'Very good' universal support

We provide all children with support and encouragement. 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 to take full account of the diversity of children's needs. We understand the impact this can have on children's experiences, interests 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 families, and appropriate next steps are identified. There are strong collaborative partnerships with all those supporting children.

Illustrations for identifying learning needs and targeted support

'Very good' identifying 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. We make very effective use of the national wellbeing indicators to provide holistic assessments of children's strengths and support needs. We ensure appropriate, proportionate and timely support, including specialist input where required.

Our senior leaders and staff fully adhere to legislative requirements. We provide high-quality targeted support to all children who require additional support with their 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.

Illustrations for inclusion and equality

'Very good' inclusion and equality

Our children and families are valued and treated with kindness, respect and fairness. We actively 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 highly effective use of technology to support involvement and engagement of children and families.

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

Staff know all children and families very well. They understand the socio-economic, cultural and linguistic context in which they live. Staff use this information effectively to respond sensitively with well-timed supports. These take account of the protected characteristics of all children and families. Highly effective strategies are in place to improve progress for all children.

Challenge questions for wellbeing, inclusion and equality

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- To what extent do our approaches ensure equity, inclusion and positively impact on children's wellbeing?
- How well do we meet the needs of individual children? How effectively do we share information with families and partners?
- How well do we use Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the wellbeing indicators to improve outcomes for children?
- How well is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child understood and embedded within our staff practice?
- What impact is regular, high-quality professional learning about wellbeing and legislative duties having on outcomes for children?

Children's progress

Children's progress is an Education Scotland quality indicator (QI) for 'supporting children to achieve'.

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practice and identify areas for growth. There are no 'weak' illustrations for this QI.

Themes for children's progress

The themes for this QI are:

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

About this quality indicator

This indicator relates to children's development, learning and progress. It requires clear understanding of early learning, child development and pedagogy to support children to make the best possible progress.

This QI reflects the integrated way children learn across all areas of learning and the importance of high-quality interactions, experiences and spaces. It emphasises that high-quality early learning contributes to closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all.

This QI reflects the holistic nature of development and learning. It ensures these foundations are secure to achieve future attainment success. It has a strong focus on the use of data and evidence to inform future planning and to report to parents about their child's progress.

Illustrations for progress over time across all areas of learning

'Very good' progress over time across all areas of learning

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. Children are becoming increasingly confident, resilient and independent learners. From the earliest stages, children are well supported 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 imaginary and real-life experiences. Children are confident to try new experiences both indoors and outdoors and engage with new learning enthusiastically.

We make very effective professional judgements about significant learning and children's progress over time based upon reliable information and data. We work in partnership with parents, colleagues, and where appropriate, other professionals to agree and share information about children's progress.

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. Families feel empowered to share children's achievements and successes from outwith the setting. We use this information meaningfully to influence future learning and progress.

Children are successful, confident and responsible learners who contribute effectively to the life of the setting and the wider community. Our staff use feedback and praise consistently well to promote positive attitudes and to encourage effective cooperation and independence. Children are developing and achieving a range of skills and attributes through engaging in a wide range of high-quality experiences.

Illustrations for 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 the range of information on children to respond sensitively with well-timed supports, taking account of family circumstances.

Our senior leaders and staff proactively plan and monitor a range of supports to reduce and minimise where possible, potential barriers to learning and development.

Our staff evaluate the impact of strategies to inform what needs to happen to ensure children continue to make progress in their learning and development. We work very effectively in partnership with colleagues to secure improved outcomes for children.

Challenge questions for children's progress and achievement

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- How effectively do we use assessment information to identify the progress children make in their learning and plan appropriate next steps?
- In what ways do we ensure children make progress across all aspects of their learning and development over time?
- How well do we track and monitor children's progress and achievement over time?
- How effectively do we share information with families and partner organisations, including colleagues across the early level, to ensure children experience continuous and progressive learning?
- How well do we use contributions about children's achievements from families? How does this impact positively on children's progress?
- How well do we use and analyse the range of information and data to secure children's progress and improve outcomes for children and families?

Safeguarding and child protection

Safeguarding and child protection is a Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland quality indicator (QI) for 'supporting children to achieve'.

There are illustrations of practice and challenge questions below. These can help you to assess your current practices and identify areas for growth. Illustrations of safeguarding and child protection are also available for [childminding settings](#) and [school-aged childcare](#).

Themes for safeguarding and child protection

The themes for this QI are:

- arrangements for safeguarding, including child protection
- children are safe, secure and protected from harm
- national guidance and legislation

About this quality indicator

This indicator highlights the responsibilities of staff and partners to ensure that all children are safe, well cared for and protected from harm. This includes how the setting takes account of statutory requirements as well as local and national policies to promote the safety of children.

Safeguarding children requires strong partnerships and communication between the setting and its local community. It is important that staff are skilled in recognising and responding to wellbeing, child protection and safeguarding concerns. The QI also recognises the importance in promoting children's ability to keep themselves safe.

Illustrations for safeguarding, including child protection

'Very good' arrangements for safeguarding, including child protection

Clear, accessible, up-to-date policies and procedures ensure the safeguarding of children, including child protection. Policies and procedures take account of the unique context of our setting and the needs of all children and their families.

Staff have strong lines of communication and effective partnerships with other agencies that are involved in helping to keep children safe and healthy. Arrangements for making a safeguarding or child protection concern are well-publicised and understood by all staff, partners and families.

All staff take part in regular professional learning and have a very good understanding of the setting's policies and procedures. As a result, staff are highly skilled and confident in identifying and responding to any child protection or safeguarding issue.

Leaders have been trained in safeguarding matters to a high level, resulting in sound knowledge and understanding. They demonstrate strong leadership in ensuring arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are integral to the work of the setting.

'Weak' arrangements for safeguarding, including child protection

Policies and procedures for safeguarding children, including child protection are unclear and not well understood by staff. There is limited consideration given to the unique context of our service.

Leaders have not sufficiently developed and implemented effective child protection policies and procedures. This means lines of communication regarding protection and health concerns for children are not robust or clear. As a result, there is an increased risk of harm to children. Leaders have failed to address and identify staff training needs in relation to safeguarding or child protection. This means staff are not confident to recognise or respond to child protection or safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding or protection concerns might be missed, compromising children's safety.

Record keeping is inconsistent and does not always show a clear understanding of risks to children. Opportunities to ensure appropriate supports are missed. Partner agencies are not kept informed to support children and families. This shows links with other organisations, which could assist in the protection of children, are not fully effective.

Illustrations for children are safe, secure and protected from harm

'Very good' safety and security

Children feel safe and cared for. Our ethos and vision strongly promote children's rights and equality. All children experience positive, trusting relationships with adults. Children are actively encouraged to give their views and voice any concerns.

Staff and partners know children and their families very well. Positive and supportive relationships between children, families and staff result in high levels of trust and effective communication. As a result, staff are skilled in identifying children who may be at risk of harm.

The needs and concerns of children and their families are dealt with timeously, sensitively and effectively. Through well-planned experiences and interactions, the safety and resilience of children is a key feature of learning and play with a strong focus on promoting children's ability to keep themselves safe.

'Weak' safety and security

Our ethos and vision fail to effectively promote children's rights. Opportunities to develop trusting relationships and actively listen to children are missed. Children's views are not always taken into consideration or respected.

We do not know children and families well enough to build meaningful relationships. Information required to keep children safe and protected from harm is not available to relevant staff and/or partner agencies. As a result, children's safety and care are potentially compromised.

Children and families do not feel listened to and concerns that may arise are not taken seriously by staff or dealt with sensitively and in a timely manner. Overall, we have not taken the necessary steps to uphold the rights of children to be safe and protected from harm

Illustrations for national guidance and legislation

'Very good' use of national guidance and legislation

We have a very good understanding of legislation, as well as national and local guidance that impacts on the care and safety of children in our setting. Our leaders ensure that they comply with their child protection duties under legislation.

Approaches to reporting, responding to and recording concerns are robust and in line with national guidance. We are proactive in ensuring that practices and approaches take appropriate account of new guidance and emerging issues.

'Weak' use of national guidance and legislation

Staff have a limited understanding of legislation or national and local guidance. Therefore reporting, responding to and recording of concerns are inconsistent and not always effective. This has the potential to compromise children's safety and care.

Our leaders have a limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities, therefore there is a potential increased risk of harm to children. Our understanding and implementation of national guidance is not effective and could impact on care and safety of children and families.

Challenge questions safeguarding and child protection

The following challenge questions can support your self-evaluation:

- Is there an appropriate designated person in place for child protection?
- Do all families and stakeholders know who this is and how to raise a concern if necessary?
- To what extent are approaches to safeguarding reviewed as part of our self-evaluation arrangements?
- How often do we review and update our arrangements to support and keep children safe?
- How do we ensure effective partnerships with all parties, including staff, families and external agencies, to ensure children's safety and wellbeing?
- How well do we support children and their families to ensure children are safe, secure and protected from harm?
- How effectively are children who are on or were previously on the child protection register and/or care experienced being supported?
- How do we ensure information is shared appropriately and sensitively to ensure effective support for children and families and to protect dignity whilst maintaining safety and wellbeing?
- How do we ensure that all staff, including visiting staff, understand our arrangements to keep children safe and are kept up-to-date with effective safeguarding practice and current national guidance and legislation?

Contact

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The quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors is also available on the [Education Scotland website](http://www.education.gov.scot).

