



Document: **Response to *The Future of Early Years Inspection*, an Ofsted consultation**

Date: **September 2004**

Questions 1-5 posed by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) in bold

Responses from the Pre-school Learning Alliance follow.

1. I support the proposal to give all registered nurseries, playgroups and childminders shorter notice of inspection (proposal 1).

Completely Agree

Ofsted should also consider introducing 'no notice' inspections so that registered nurseries, playgroups and childminders understand that an inspector may call at any time.

2. I support the proposal to have a grading scale for early years inspections that is the same as that for schools (proposal 2).

Partly Agree

In principle this proposal is logical as it would bring coherence to the system of inspection of provision for children and young people up to the age of 19. However it is important to remember that in terms of early years care inspection Ofsted's remit is to ensure that a series of minimum standards are met. It is arguable that this responsibility does not lead to conclusions that a setting is 'excellent' or 'good' in meeting the standards, merely that the standards have been met or not.

However in terms of funded nursery education there is a responsibility that providers adhere to the Foundation Stage Curriculum. In these circumstances an inspection framework could be established that led to the relative conclusions of excellent, good etc.

It is also important to acknowledge that any common grading system with schools should demand a common approach to inspections. In schools a team of inspectors immerses itself in the workings of the school for considerable periods of time. In a common system early years settings should expect inspectors to evaluate a number of sessions to examine effectively the quality of provision.

3. I support the proposal to change the report format for early years inspection reports (proposal 3).

Do Not Agree

This proposal appears to continue the confusion around Ofsted's role in inspecting early years settings outlined in question 2 above. In terms of an assessment of whether a setting meets the minimum standards required then a report for a 'passing' setting will be shorter than one for an 'inadequate' one. The latter report would need to contain a series of recommendations, action plans etc to ensure that the setting improves.

However in terms of an evaluation of the overall quality of the provision offered by a setting, the Alliance would not support the proposal that 'good' settings receive a less detailed report than those judged inadequate. Good settings deserve full details of the evidence used by inspectors to reach their assessment. This allows the setting to plan for further improvements into the future.

4. I support the proposal to ask registered nurseries, playgroups and childminders to undertake a self-evaluation to inform the inspection. This will then be used as a basis for discussion with the inspector (proposal 4).

Partly Agree

Self-evaluation is a necessary part of planning and sustaining high quality early years provision. Only through effective and honest self-evaluation can a setting continue to improve the quality of care and education it offers to children. Self-evaluation is not a skill universally held and if this is to become a key element of inspection then effective training and support will need to be offered to staff and volunteers in the sector.

The Alliance would counsel caution if Ofsted plans to introduce a system where 'effective self-evaluation could lead to a shorter inspection'. Through its quality assurance and development scheme, *Aiming For Quality*, the Alliance has considerable experience of working with settings' self-evaluations. Our assessors have learned that a judgement about the effectiveness and accuracy of a self-evaluation report is best made at the end of the assessment of the setting's provision rather than being a substitute for part of the visit.

5. I support the proposal for Ofsted to take account of 'Investors in Children' approved quality assurance schemes when determining the frequency of inspections and the length of inspection visits (proposal 5).

Do not agree

The Alliance welcomes the recognition given by Ofsted to Investors in Children (IiC) accredited quality assurance schemes. Such schemes, including the Alliance's *Aiming For Quality* support early years settings to build upon the minimum standards required for registration. Clearly a setting would be keen to demonstrate to an Ofsted inspector that they are committed to improving the quality of the service they offer, and undertaking an IiC approved scheme would present one method through which this could be done.

However the Alliance would not support the proposal that an IiC scheme becomes in some way part of the inspection process. Ofsted's remit is to sustain a regulatory framework that assesses whether a setting has passed the minimum standards required by the state. This necessarily creates a wholly different culture from IiC approved schemes which work with settings to support their commitment to continually improve the quality of their provision. If

liC scheme staff were perceived in some way as the 'eyes and ears' of Ofsted this would undermine their integrity and could act as a disincentive for settings to undertake the quality assurance route.