

# PRE-SCHOOL Inspection Guidance

September 2019

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ETI: Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments





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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of inspection is to promote the highest possible standards of learning, teaching and achievement throughout the education, training and youth sectors.

Our vision, our mission, is:

*‘Promoting improvement in the interest of all learners’.*

Further information of the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) including the Charter for Inspection, ETI principles, values and standards and customer service is available on the [ETI website](#).

This handbook describes the main activities undertaken by the ETI during inspections of pre-school centres (in Nursery schools, Private and Voluntary Pre-school, Nursery Classes and Nursery Units in Primary schools) in Northern Ireland. It sets out the processes before, during and after inspection and lays out clearly for schools the kinds of evidence and activities that inspectors use to make their evaluations and on which they report.

This guidance document seeks to improve the transparency of the inspection process, promote consistency and dispel any myths around inspection. While promoting consistency, it is important for centres<sup>1</sup> to be aware that this handbook is not a set of rigid set of rules; the ETI will carry out inspections with flexibility to respond to the individual context and circumstances of each centre.

## PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION PROCEDURES

### Pre-inspection

- Inspection Services Team (IST) will notify the pre-school centre<sup>1</sup> of the inspection by telephone call and issue an email which contains links to the supporting documentation; this will be followed up through a telephone call by the Reporting Inspector (RI) to the leader/principal.
- The pre-school will be requested to complete associated inspection documentation<sup>2</sup>, including the safeguarding proforma.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document the term ‘centre’ is used to denote all pre-school settings, except where there are differences to procedures/arrangements within voluntary/ private centres and nursery schools/units in which case these will be indicated explicitly.

<sup>2</sup> Associated inspection information is available in Appendix 1

### During the inspection

- The RI will allocate team duties for inspectors to lead on areas under evaluation, as required.
- Inspectors will observe the sessions and hold discussions with relevant members of staff as required. The arrangements for observations and discussions with staff are flexible and subject to change as the inspection progresses.
- Inspectors will give advance notice of discussions with members of staff. A programme of discussions may be agreed with the principal/leader in advance and confirmed at the start of the inspection; however, it may also be subject to change as the inspection progresses.
- A moderation meeting will be held on the afternoon of inspection, during which performance levels and a conclusion for overall effectiveness will be agreed by the inspection team.
- The RI and DRI will provide an oral report back to the pre-school principal/leader and representatives from the various stakeholders on the afternoon of the inspection.

### Post-inspection

- The centre will receive a pre-publication copy of the report to check the accuracy of factual information.
- The final report will be published on the ETI website.
- For centres evaluated as having either a high level of capacity for sustained improvement or the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all learners, there will be no follow-up inspection.
- For other centres, the ETI will engage in a formal follow-up inspection process. For centres evaluated as needing to address important area(s) for improvement, this will take place within 12 to 18 months; the follow-up will take place within a two year timeframe for those centres evaluated as needing to address urgently significant areas for improvement.
- This guidance is provided for illustrative purposes only and may vary depending on the size and context of the centre and emerging findings and evidence as the inspection progresses. All inspections will, however, adhere to the protocols outlined above.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Pre-school inspection models

In order to take account of the different stages of development of pre-school centres, different types of inspection will be used.

### District visit

All new, or recently re-opened, pre-school centres will receive a district visit from the district inspector. During this visit, the centre's work is evaluated and the district inspector spends time with the staff, providing feedback on the current quality of provision, strengths and key areas for improvement in order to provide a baseline for further inspection. Feedback may also be provided to the early years specialist EYS and a representative of the management group. District visits may also be made at any time with or without advance notice.

### Inspection

Scheduled inspections are carried out in a cycle over a number of years.

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all children, the purpose of a pre-school inspection is to evaluate the:

- outcomes for children;
- quality of provision; and
- quality of leadership and management.

The inspection will normally be carried out by at least one inspector from the ETI and at least one other team member (as proportionate to the size of the centre or nursery school).

The team member will either be another inspector or an associate assessor.

In reaching evaluations the ETI uses the quality indicators which are available in the ETI Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication (ISEF)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See link to most recent version of the ISEF in Appendix 2.

## WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE INSPECTION?

Following notification of the inspection, IST and the RI will contact the leader/principal by telephone as soon as possible to discuss the following:

- the composition of the inspection team (including the AA), confirmation of the dates of the inspection and the arrangements for reporting to the centre;
- the availability of a base room from which the inspection team can operate;
- the availability of the chairperson of the management group / governors and the EYS;
- the distribution of the information on the staff/teacher, support staff and parent/carer/guardian online questionnaires;
- the availability of the booklet, Information for Parents, Carers and Guardians, informing parents about the inspection process;
- the completion of the ETI Safeguarding Proforma<sup>4</sup> which should be verified, signed and dated by the chairperson of the management committee/board of governors and the leader/principal, and given to the RI on the morning of the inspection;
- the Statistical Information Sheet to be completed and available for the day of the inspection; and
- the documentation to be available for the inspection visit<sup>5</sup>.

**The RI should be made aware of any issue or event which you think may affect the pre-school or any of the staff before, or at any time during, the inspection.**

**The leader/principal should inform, as is relevant to the centre, the officer from the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools, the Education Authority, the Health and Social Care Trust or the Early Years Specialist about the inspection.**

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<sup>4</sup> For a nursery unit, or reception class in a primary school, the safeguarding proforma is completed for the Primary school as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Hyperlinked list of documentation required for pre-school inspections in Appendix 1.



## **QUESTIONNAIRES USED AS PART OF PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION**

### **Parental, support staff and teacher questionnaires**

The ETI provides an opportunity for parents/carers and staff to complete a confidential online questionnaire prior to the inspection. You will receive a copy of the letters for distribution to parents and staff which contain the relevant detail to enable them to register and complete the online questionnaire specific to your centre.

The RI will report a summary of the outcomes of the questionnaire returns to the leader/principal and to a representative of the management group/governors; the RI will discuss any matters that arise in the returns.

If you have any queries about the distribution of parental or staff questionnaires please contact IST.

## PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION OUTLINE

Most pre-school inspections are completed in one day.

### Pre-school inspection (illustration):

Day one	Activity
Approximately 15-20 minutes before the start of the session	Team arrival; introductions. Check that documentation is available.
Beginning of session (onwards)	Observations by the team. The inspection team will observe all aspects of the centre's planned programme. The inspection team may talk with the children about what they are doing as they play, but will generally avoid interrupting the staff in their work during the sessions. Scrutiny of documentation. The inspection team will read the documentation provided, including the centre's evidence of self-evaluation.
At an agreed time	Meetings with key members of staff to: provide feedback on the confidential questionnaire; discuss care and welfare, and safeguarding; and, to gather further information to complete the inspection evidence base.
At an agreed time	Meeting with the principal (nursery school) or leader and EYS (voluntary or private pre-school).
At an agreed time	Meeting with the management group/board of governors.
Afternoon	Moderation meeting Team meeting, chaired by the RI, to collate and discuss the findings from the inspection and to moderate and agree the key strengths and areas for improvement against the indicators outlined in the ISEF. Performance levels will be agreed for the core areas of the inspection, namely outcomes for pupils, quality of provision and leadership and management. The overall effectiveness conclusion for the centre will also be agreed. An additional inspector, with responsibility of quality assurance, may attend the moderation meeting as part of the ETI quality assurance process.
Afternoon	Report preparation by the RI and DRI or team member.
At an agreed time	Oral report RI and DRI or team member report orally the key findings of the inspection to the leader/principal, chairperson and/or representatives of the management committee or governors, EYS or representative of the employing authority and other relevant stakeholders (in agreement with the RI) .

At an agreed time the inspection team provide an oral report back to the leadership and management/governors<sup>6</sup>. The leader/principal should arrange for a member of the employing authority to be present. In a nursery unit the timings may vary and will be agreed with the principal and reporting inspector for the primary school<sup>7</sup>.

The purpose of the oral report is to afford all in attendance the opportunity to seek clarification, where necessary, about the main inspection findings.

The RI outlines the inspection findings orally and a member of staff should take notes as there is no written feedback left at this time. In a nursery unit, the emerging findings will be reported in agreement with the primary RI and principal. At the oral report, the provisional overall effectiveness conclusion will be shared with the centre. This will indicate clearly to the pre-school centre or nursery school:

- the capacity of the centre for sustained improvement; and
- the nature and timing of follow-up activity.

The RI will: invite comment and answer any questions on the findings to provide further clarification if required; invite comment on the conduct of the inspection by the inspection team; and, draw attention to the opportunity to complete an independent questionnaire on the inspection process.

The performance levels and overall effectiveness conclusion fed back at the oral report back are provisional, and subject to moderation as part of the ETI's moderation and quality assurance process. They are confidential to the staff and board of governors and not final until the report is published.

The RI will mediate to the leader/principal any changes to performance levels or overall effectiveness conclusion, as a result of any additional moderation and quality assurance. The final inspection report will contain only a summary of the key evaluations and findings rather than the finer detail shared and discussed during the oral report.

Following the report back, the centre should begin work on any area(s) for improvement identified.

<sup>6</sup> *In a nursery unit/reception group inspected at the same time as the primary school, there are separate arrangements for meeting with the board of governors of the school.*

<sup>7</sup> *In a nursery unit the timings may vary and will be agreed with the principal and reporting inspector for the primary school.*

## Post-inspection

Approximately four weeks after the inspection, the leader/principal will receive a final, quality-assured pre-publication copy of the inspection report for the purposes of a checking the accuracy factual information.

This is the final opportunity to draw any **inaccuracies** in **factual information** to the attention of the RI. This procedure is intended to avoid any factual information being reported inaccurately within the published report. You are **not** being asked to comment on the evaluations or findings within the report. In the interests of publishing the report as quickly as possible, the leader/principal should ensure that all factual inaccuracies are identified and reported at this stage, as this is the only opportunity to do so. Where no response is received from the leader/principal within the time specified by the Inspection Services Team, it will be assumed that there are no factual errors and the report will proceed to publication on ETI website.

The final inspection report is published within six weeks of the inspection. Additional copies of reports are available through the ETI website. The employing authority (EA/CCMS) or the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) (as appropriate) will receive the report by e-mail.

The leader/principal receives a password in order for the leader and the staff to complete an Evaluation of Inspection proforma from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

## INSPECTION OF CARE AND WELFARE, AND SAFEGUARDING

It is important to note that all members of the inspection team contribute to the evidence base for the evaluation of care and welfare throughout the centre. The arrangements for safeguarding will be included in the inspection and reported on within the written report.

The ETI's role is to inspect, validate, evaluate and report (based on the first-hand evidence available during inspection) on care, welfare and safeguarding and report that the centre is monitoring and reviewing safeguarding and welfare at least annually. It is recommended in the DE Circular 2017/04 Guide for Schools (Para 4.2) to use the ETI proforma as a tool for an annual review of care, welfare and safeguarding procedures.

Centres should note that the signed and dated safeguarding proforma will be held by ETI as record of the centre's evaluation of safeguarding at the point of inspection.

**Please note that there are two versions of the proforma – one for nursery schools and a different one for private and voluntary pre-schools centres.**

Prior to the inspection, the centre will be asked to complete and sign and date the safeguarding proforma and give it to the RI at the start of the inspection. Any issues arising with regard to the safeguarding of the pupils will be followed up by the inspection team.

Also, prior to the inspection, parents and staff of the centre will be given the opportunity to complete an online questionnaire. A summary of the responses to the parental and staff questionnaires, including any written comments, will be reported orally to the leader/principal and representatives from the governors/members of the management group by the RI during the inspection.

### **Special educational needs**

The inspection team will evaluate the quality of the special education provision and the impact of individual education plans on the children's learning and well-being.

## **INSPECTION OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

The inspection team will need to see a range of the activities provided for pre-school children. It is particularly useful if a timetable, or outline of the activities, is made available. The inspection team will not expect to see any particular methods or types of activities. The educational provision as a whole should be in line with guidance provided by the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) and DE, as outlined in the document, Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education.

The inspection team will record observations, scrutinise all relevant documentation and have discussions with key staff and management. The information gathered will be used as the basis for the evaluations as reported orally and in the written report after the inspection. The inspection team will want to see the pre-school centre working as normally as possible. It is not necessary to alter the educational programme for the inspection, or to have extra adults unless they are normally present. Students or trainees should be present if they are due to be on placement on the day of the inspection.

The inspection team will give most emphasis to the quality of the children's development and progression in learning and how well these are promoted across all areas of the pre-school curriculum set out in the Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education and in line with the Early Years Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF).

When appropriate, the inspection team may talk to the children about what they are doing as they play both indoors and outdoors; a member of the team may be present during story-time, music-making, or any other activities organised by the staff. The inspection team will seek a convenient time at the end of the session to talk to the staff

about aspects of their work; they will take care not to interrupt them unduly while they are involved with the children.

Evidence of development planning and self-evaluation carried out by the staff (and the EYS) will be considered carefully as part of the inspection. The inspection team will give due recognition where the staff have themselves identified accurately aspects of their provision which need to be improved or developed, and have already made a start to addressing the issues. The staff's approach to reflecting on their work and bringing about improvement will form part of the inspection evidence.

## **SUMMARY OF THE KEY INFORMATION THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE PRE-SCHOOL**

### **Documentation to be completed prior to inspection and available on the day of the inspection:**

- The signed and dated relevant safeguarding proforma.
- The completed statistical information.

### **Documentation to be available in the base room during the inspection:**

- A timetable of daily and/or weekly activities.
- The policy and provision made for children with special educational needs.
- Details of any children with special educational needs, including records, individual plans and/or statements.
- Details of any specific support arrangements for children with special educational needs (e.g. from a therapist or support staff).
- Numbers of children, if any, on a child protection register (but not their names or other details).
- Written planning for the educational programme, including long- and short-term plans and evaluations carried out.
- The records maintained for each child.
- The range of policies and procedures for safeguarding, including vetting arrangements, the complaints and reporting procedures, and the information given to parents.
- The policy on behaviour management.

- Other relevant written policies e.g. on staff training and development, settling-in, health and safety.
- Details of recent educational visits including the planning and risk assessments carried out.
- Information provided for parents and the methods used to involve parents in their children's pre-school education.
- Details of links with the primary schools to which the children transfer and arrangements for exchanging information.
- Details of any links and shared education with other pre-school centres, relevant agencies (e.g. health or social services) and the wider community.
- Details of relevant training/development attended by each staff member within the past 3 years.
- The development plan for the pre-school centre: a nursery school/class should make available the School Development Plan.
- Details of any self-evaluation carried out including action plans and evidence of improvement.
- Brief details of any accreditation gained.
- All general and attendance registers should be available.
- Health and Social Care Registration Certificate (voluntary/private sector)
- Nursery schools/classes/reception groups should provide a copy of the school prospectus.
- Extended service or additional funding provision.
- Voluntary/private pre-school centres should have available details of the support provided by the qualified teacher or early years specialist, including action plans and EYS reports.
- Voluntary/private pre-school centres should have available a copy of the latest report from the relevant Health and Social Care Trust and details of any subsequent action taken by the staff.

## FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION PROCESS

There are four overall effectiveness conclusions that have individual follow-up processes:

The pre-school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

The pre-school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

The pre-school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the pre-school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

The pre-school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the pre-school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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The district inspector (DI) will visit to monitor the progress being made by the centre (including a nursery unit if necessary) in implementing any post-inspection action plan.

If necessary, a follow-up inspection takes place within the period of time outlined at the report-back and in the letter from the Department of Education if the centre is evaluated as having important or significant areas for improvement. A short report is issued to the centre and to those who received the original report. A copy is made available through the ETI website: [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)

Where insufficient progress is made in addressing the areas for improvement, and after further time is allowed for action, a second follow-up inspection is carried out and the report is published.

In the case of the provision for reception or nursery unit being evaluated as less than good, it will be followed-up and reported on during the primary school follow-up inspection, if there is one. Alternatively, the ETI will make separate arrangements to evaluate the quality of the improvements made within the reception or nursery unit provision.



## Post-inspection action plans

When the overall conclusion is that the centre has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners, the ETI will monitor how the centre sustains improvement through district visits. There is no requirement from the Department of Education to draw up internal action plans.

When the overall conclusion is that the centre demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners, the Department of Education (DE) will ask the centre to draw up an internal action plan which will be monitored through district visits.

When the overall conclusion is that the centre needs to address an important area or address urgently the significant areas for improvement in the interest of all the learners, DE writes to the centre requesting an action plan.

DE forwards the action plan to the ETI for comment. There may be some contact with the centre at this point. For example, an additional district visit may be conducted if clarification of the action plan is required. The action plan forms the basis for the follow-up inspection process.

## Interim follow-up visit and follow-up inspection procedures

There is no notification letter for interim follow-up visits; approximately two weeks before the visit, the DI contacts the centre to provide notification of the interim follow-up visit and make arrangements.

Centres will receive formal notification of the follow-up inspection from the IST, approximately two weeks before the inspection. The DI will usually be the RI for follow-up inspection activity.

### Interim follow-up visit

At the initial phone call, the DI explains that the aim of the interim follow-up visit is to evaluate the centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. It is a matter for the centre to demonstrate progress in taking forward the action plan(s) which may take the form of an interim evaluation. The centre should be made aware that the evidence gathered during the visit contributes to the overall follow-up inspection evidence base. A meeting with the EYS/employing authority representative may be necessary to determine the nature, extent and impact of the support provided.

An oral report is given to the leader/principal, the chair of the management committee/board of governors (or representative) and the EYS/representative of the employing authority. In the case of centres where the original overall conclusion was to address urgently the significant areas for improvement, the centre will receive a short written report letter. An interim visit does not result in a re-evaluation.

### Follow-up inspection

The IST will notify the school of the inspection by email which contains links to supporting documentation and will be followed-up by a phone call. The RI, typically, the DI, will telephone the principal to confirm the details of the inspection.

The follow-up inspection builds on the evidence base from the interim follow-up visit including observations and discussions. It is the responsibility of the centre to provide clear, concise, robust evidence of sustained and sustainable improvement.

Following notification of the inspection, IST and the RI will contact the principal/leader by telephone as soon as possible to discuss the following:

- the composition of the inspection team, confirmation of the dates of the inspection and the arrangements for reporting to the centre;
- the arrangements for the inspection and other aspects of the work of the centre to be included in the inspection;
- the availability of the Pre-school Inspection Guidance booklet on the ETI website and other relevant guidance materials and leaflets;
- the availability of a base room for the inspection team; and
- the arrangements for meeting the management committee and EYS/governors during the inspection.

At the end of the follow-up inspection, an oral report is given to the leader/principal, the chair, or representative, of the management committee/board of governors and the EYS/representative of the employing authority. The centre receives a pre-publication copy of the follow-up inspection report which is then published on the ETI website.

## Appendix 1

### **HYPERLINKED LIST OF DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FOR PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTIONS:**

[Statistical Information Sheet;](#)

[Safeguarding proforma - Private and voluntary pre-school playgroups;](#)

**or**

[Safeguarding proforma - Nursery schools.](#)

**HYPERLINKED LIST OF SUPPORT MATERIAL AVAILABLE FOR  
PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTIONS:**

[Inspection Self-Evaluation Framework for Pre-School;](#)

[Inspection Self-Evaluation Framework for Pre-School Management Groups;](#)

[Inspection Self-Evaluation Framework for Governance;](#)

[Information for parents, carers and guardians;](#)

[What Happens After an Inspection?;](#)and

[Complaints Procedure](#)

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