

Leadership and Management for Systems of Quality

How can quality be defined? According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2012) Quality is “The standard of how good something is as measured against other similar things” How can we measure Quality? How can we measure if a setting is a quality setting or not? The development of children in their first five years have been found to be of high importance, and can enhance their life chances, Good quality care can have a positive effect on children, and experiences that occur in pre-school childcare can have beneficial outcomes (Brock 2015).

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) is an independent regulator for childcare in Wales. They are there to make sure that all childcare settings such as Flying Starts, fostering services and children’s care homes, provide quality service. They do this through inspections, and they can take action if any concerns are raised (Care Inspectorate Wales 2023). From 2016, Care Inspectorate Wales, requires registered providers of childcare to complete a Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) which is done annually online. The information that is included in the statement, tells Care Inspectorate Wales about the service that is provided and what systems there are in place, to monitor and improve the quality of the service to the children in the setting (Play Wales 2023).

Care Inspectorate Wales carries out inspections which are regulated by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 and the Children and Families Measure 2010 (Legislation.gov.uk 2023).

When giving an inspection the inspectors will check how the service in the setting is delivered, this includes: observations, using the Short Observational Framework for Inspection (SOFI), listening and talking to those using the service and also their Families, Listening and talking to staff and managers and reading through the relevant records and procedures (Care Inspectorate Wales 2023b).

Inspections are carried out in schools by Estyn, they visit schools and inspect the education and training. The improvement of quality education is the main reason of the inspections with an aim to help and support training providers (Estyn 2022).

The Welsh Government brought out the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12, for local authorities, child minders and day care suppliers. Every registered child minder and day care provider must perform to

these standards. The National Minimum Standards allow childcare providers flexibility in developing quality care and settings, which can be designed around the children and what they need (Welsh Government 2016).

Where can we find quality childcare? As touched upon in previous paragraphs, all childcare providers in Wales are inspected regularly, to ensure that the children in their care are being supported with their development and wellbeing. From 2019, when being inspected by Care Inspectorate Wales, they will look at and give ratings of Excellent; Good; Adequate or Poor on the specific themes of Wellbeing; Care and Development; Environment and Leadership and Management (Care Inspectorate Wales 2023c) Signs of high quality can also be seen in a clean and safe setting, the interactions between practitioner and child are positive and that parents are always kept informed of their child's care and development (Pacey 2023).

The Welsh government has a programme called Flying Start, This programme is for families who live in disadvantaged areas and have children under four years old. A successful Flying start setting has three measures of Quality. A High-Quality Experience, that uses the outdoor space and is stimulating, where the children that attend feel safe and valued, and that the children should feel independent and be encouraged with play-based experiences. A High-Quality Environment, where there areas that are appropriate for staff to teach, have an area where the children's family feel welcome and the Flying Start building inside and out should be to a high standard. High Quality People, provision of the highest quality should be delivered by Flying Start staff and therefor they should be highly trained attend courses to continually improve themselves and the setting (Welsh Government 2014).

A review of The National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare between 2017 and 2019 found that to maintain quality in settings, Continued Professional Development must be emphasised, guidance should be clearer for the child-minding role and continued work with Care Inspectorate Wales, to more understand what needs to be done to meet with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards (Welsh Government 2019).

Most childcare providers have seen the benefits of using environmental rating scales in their settings, the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), is a tool that is designed to measure the quality of the setting and has a focus on all of the needs of infants and toddlers, from birth up to three years old and the aim is to improve the quality of the setting. This scale looks at the provisions in the settings environment

and how the practitioner and children interact. These interactions can affect the development of infants and toddlers, which can include the development of the children's language and social skills. (Coventry City Council 2019, Yazejian 2017). ITERS, have thirty-three items in the checklist, these are organised into six different subheadings. This means that the Space and Furnishings in the settings are looked at, for example the arrangement of the room and the furnishings that are used for the children's care, learning and play. Personal Care Routines are checked with how the children are managed when using the toilet or having a nappy change, how the children are treated at meal and snack times and the settings practices of health and safety. The Language and Book item check to see how much conversation there is with the children and how they respond, if the children are being encouraged to communicate and use books and if the staff themselves use the books that they have. The Activities section can look at the fine and gross motor skills of the children in the setting along with the use of technology, music, nature and maths. Also included in this section is how the staff in the setting promote and welcome diversity. When checking for Interaction, Inspectors look at how the staff in the setting are supervising the children when they are learning or playing, how the staff guide the children's behaviour and if they are providing physical touch. Inspectors will also look into the activities that the children are doing when playing in groups and when they have free play, and they will also look at the schedules of the setting (NH CONNECTIONS 2023, Columbia University No Date).

ECERS is the scale that is used for children aged three years to five years, and where as ITERS has 33 items, ECERS have 35. They are very similar tools, that look for the same things, but some have slightly changed in accordance with the children's age. ECERS also look at the Space and Furnishings for how the room is arranged for the children's play and learning, if there is any space so that the children can have some privacy if they need it and if there are any equipment for gross motor activities and the space to use them. The section on Personal Care Routines remains the same as ITERS, where as Language and Books has a slight change to Language and Literacy. The items in this section are the same, however there is an added item that, children should start to become more familiar with books and the writing inside them. Activities also has a slight change to Learning Activities, where inspectors also look for actives and materials that include mathematics and how the children use maths in though out the event they participate in daily. The

Interaction section changes slightly also, Inspectors will also look at how discipline is achieved in the setting and if the staff are playing with one child at a time for individual teaching. The only change in the Programme Structure section is that the whole of the class should participate in an activity together (North Carolina University No Date).

In Wales, childcare providers must register with the Care Inspectorate Wales (Reed and Canning 2012) and will have their first full inspection six months after the registration and then every twelve months if no concerns arise or and have been reported (Care Inspectorate Wales 2018). When performing an inspection, Care Inspectorate Wales will put the rights of the children at the centre of their inspection. This can be done by looking at the way childcare providers ensure that the children in their care feel safe and nurtured, that they are all treated equally and with respect, that the children are helped by the staff of the setting in every way possible with their development and that each child has a voice. By looking for evidence of these, Care Inspectorate Wales can determine whether or not the setting is working in accordance with, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF No Date), The Equality Act 2010 (UK Government 2015) and the Human Rights Act 1998 (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2018). During the inspection, Care Inspectorate Wales will also check on the procedures policies regarding safeguarding. If at any time during the inspection, the inspector witnesses any practice within the setting that demonstrates that any member of staff is not safe to be working with children, they can take enforcement action to ensure the safeguarding of the children in the setting (Care Inspectorate Wales 2019).

For young children, along with their families, Quality childcare is important, however, measuring quality is difficult as policies and procedures change over time, Parents and families may not agree with Care inspectorate Wales about what high quality care is when it comes to their children, as we see more diverse actions needed to be taken, quality childcare for one child may not mean quality for another. Disabled children and children with additional learning needs could have different elements of quality of care that is as individual as them, (Sylva *et al* 2010 and Abbott and Langston 2005).

When Inspections are due, all staff as a team should be prepared, time for revisiting and reading handbooks if any policies or procedures are not remembered by a staff member should be allocated. Managers should ensure that all staff would feel

comfortable and confident if asked questions by an inspector and be able to explain how you deliver quality care to the children, Staff should be well informed of all extra support that children with a disability or additional learning needs have, and all other relevant information about the setting (Pacey 2023b, Martland 2021).

However, when inspectors show up for one day, are they seeing a true reflection of how the setting works and how the children feel or behave on a daily basis. What is achieved one day by an early year's child with a practitioner may not be achieved on another day, when being observed by an inspector they may feel shy or have anxiety with strangers around them (Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families 2023, Pelly 2019)

When looking at the outdoor environment, if the inspection is on a day where the weather is wet and windy, especially in Wales where there were over 130 days where it was raining in 2022 (Statista 2023) and all the outdoor toys and equipment are covered to protect them, would the inspector be able evaluate the outdoor area and the access to it properly. Would an inspector that normally visits with older children be able to inspect a setting with younger children and fully understand how the setting is meant to work (Abbot and Langston 2005).

The English version on ESTYN is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, has been criticised for not letting schools improve and affecting the health and wellbeing of the head teachers and teachers they are there to support. Many practitioners in England, think that the inspectorate could do with an overhaul or even a full removal. The English practitioners feel that inspectors are disrespectful and underqualified (Craven 2023, Ehren and MacBeath 2016).

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