

Leadership and Management for systems of quality in early years

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining today's leadership meeting as we prepare for our upcoming inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). The purpose of this discussion is to reflect on how we evaluate the quality of our provision, gather feedback from stakeholders, and use this information to improve practice in line with legislation, policies, and the National Minimum Standards.

As our Flying Start Parent Relationships Lead, my objective in preparing for inspection through the Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) is to ensure honest and impact-driven parent partnership evaluation. My leadership role is to collect stakeholder opinion, select themes, and use this data to make strategic decisions.

We sustain high-quality provision through monitoring, evaluation, and reflection. Quality assurance ensures children receive safe, high-quality care and education (Unicef, 2020). The National Minimum Standards require providers to have effective quality monitoring and evaluation processes to address the needs of children and families (Welsh Government, 2023), enabling inspection accountability. Our approach follows CIW guidelines and is supported by the UNCRC, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act 2018.

Our Flying Start nursery and the Childcare Offer for Wales support disadvantaged families, so strong parent partnerships are vital (Welsh Government, 2023). Collaboration enhances children's learning, development, and wellbeing (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000); however, time, language, and confidence barriers require flexible, inclusive approaches according to Goodall & Montgomery (2014).

The Quality of Care Review and Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) are our main self-evaluation tools. The Quality of Care Review fosters continual improvement and is required by Regulation 16 of the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010. Parents, children, staff, and other professionals can reflect using SASS (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2026). SASS supports continual improvement, triangulated feedback, and holistic parent-child comprehension. Engaging minority families and capturing children's voices are challenges. Through this triangulated approach, three important parent relationship concerns were identified and prioritized for development.

The first issue is poor parental engagement. Limited questionnaire response and irregular parents' evening attendance. Surveys collect structured, quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2018), but replies might be superficial and may not represent all families, especially underprivileged or English-language learners (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Epstein, 2018). Work, transport, and confidence hurdles prevent parents from attending parents' nights, which provide meaningful interaction and insight into children's learning and routines (Siraj Blatchford & Clarke, 2002; Welsh Government, 2023). These strategies may unintentionally exclude voices, compromising inclusive practise and UNCRC principles (United Nations, 1989).

To address this, we are introducing flexible feedback methods such as short digital surveys, informal drop-off or pick-up discussions, targeted focus groups, visual aids, and translated materials. This ensures all families, particularly those experiencing poverty, can evaluate and shape the service, supporting Flying Start's goal of reducing inequalities (Welsh Government,

2023). These changes aim to increase participation and provide more representative data, demonstrating in SASS how parent voice informs practice.

The second issue relates to communication barriers with families, particularly those with English as an additional language. Our communications may be difficult for some families, especially those who speak English as a second language. Effective engagement increases children's learning and wellbeing (Siraj Blatchford & Clarke, 2002), but written communication can limit inclusivity and feedback participation (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Epstein, 2018). Supporting children's rights under UNCRC Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) and Flying Start and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 equity aims by helping parents understand and respond.

To improve this, we are increasing the use of visual communication strategies, translation tools, and reviewing how key information and policies are shared. We are also prioritising feedback from underrepresented groups to ensure their voices are actively included in service evaluation and development. These actions will strengthen inclusivity and ensure communication methods meet the diverse needs of our families.

The third issue is limited parental involvement in decision-making. While feedback is collected, parents are rarely involved in shaping policies or planning activities, limiting meaningful engagement. Active parent involvement strengthens children's learning and maintains home-setting continuity (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2002; Nutbrown, 2011). It also aligns with UNCRC Article 12 (UN, 1989), Flying Start, the Childcare Offer for Wales (Welsh Government, 2023), and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

In response, we are developing a parent advisory group, introducing "You said, we did" approaches, and increasing opportunities for parents to contribute to policy review and activity planning. These strategies move beyond consultation towards genuine co-production, demonstrating a deeper level of partnership and responsiveness. This will provide clear evidence within SASS of how parent voice directly influences practice and outcomes. This illustrates how evaluation of feedback is linked to measurable improvements in both activities and policies, demonstrating impact on children's outcomes. **Gwen – does this sound good to you?**

Reliance on questionnaires and formal meetings alone does not capture the full range of parent voices. Combining methods improves inclusivity and engagement, particularly for families facing barriers to participation (Epstein, 2018; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). By combining questionnaires, informal discussions, focus groups, and children's voices, a more comprehensive picture of setting experiences is achieved.

Children's participation is underpinned by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasises their right to express their views (United Nations, 1989). Their perspectives are gathered through observation, play-based interactions, and creative methods, offering meaningful insight that informs practice (Sun et al., 2023).

My leadership role is to apply SASS for ongoing quality improvement rather than one-time inspections. This requires anchoring reflective practice, facilitating meaningful evaluation, and converting feedback into measurable gains. I collect stakeholder feedback, prioritize themes, and assure evidence-based, impact-tracked actions as a leader. This clear link between evaluation and impact is crucial to satisfying CIW standards.

Brionny

Good morning, I am Brionny Coombes, and today I will be talking about the curriculum. In our setting, we follow the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) curriculum, while also drawing on elements of the Curriculum for Wales so that children begin to develop an early understanding of what learning will look like when they start school (Welsh Government, 2017).

Although play holds a central role within the ECPLC, we must ensure we remain reflective and intentional, maintaining the importance of play without allowing it to become unstructured or complacent (Welsh Gov, 2023). In our setting, we need to make sure we stay engaged and not become the “Grumpy Adult” that some children experience, especially in outdoor play, as this plays a significant role in shaping children’s freedom and opportunities to play (Play Wales, 2025). This emphasis on intentional, child-led play also reflects Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection expectations, which assess how adult attitudes, practitioner responsiveness and the wider play environment support children’s well-being, autonomy and freedom to explore (CIW, 2023).

Play is a spontaneous, active process that allows thinking, feeling and doing, to allow the child to thrive. Through play, in our setting, children are free to be imaginative and inventive, often transforming their understanding of themselves and the world around them. It is essential for all children, regardless of impairment or behaviour. The joy and excitement of play, the deep concentration, the freedom to explore, experiment and create, to discover how things and people work, to stretch the imagination and bridge the gap between reality and aspiration, stem from the fact that the child is in control. Play is an innate (IN-ATE) drive that enables flexible responses to change and uncertainty. We offer immediate rewards as well as longterm benefits, and we must remain firmly led by the child (Play Wales, 2021). This reflective and intentional approach to play also aligns with CIW’s inspection expectations, which emphasise the importance of wellplanned, stimulating play environments and practitioner practice that actively supports children’s wellbeing, development and engagement (Pacey, n.d.).

The ECPLC places the child at its centre, prioritising their developmental needs. It recognises childhood as a valuable stage of life, acknowledging that babies and young children play, learn and grow in diverse ways, and that they require consistent care and nurturing to support this. We are committed to removing barriers so that every baby and young child can experience a happy, fulfilling childhood (Welsh Gov, 2026). Our Flying Start practitioners working in childcare settings that deliver Flying Start provision should be familiar with this guidance and use it as a foundation for their practice, while also drawing on other key documents such as the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) resources and the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Childcare for children up to 12 years old in Wales (Welsh Gov, 2026). This child-centred, developmentally responsive approach is also reflected in CIW’s inspection framework, which evaluates how well settings meet children’s individual needs and use national guidance, such as the ECPLC and the National Minimum Standards, to underpin high-quality practice (CIW, 2024).

Our setting is in compliance with the Self-Assessment of Self Service (SASS). The SASS is an online form that must be completed by Registered Persons and Responsible Individuals. It is a legal requirement for all childminders and childcare or play providers registered with CIW (CIW, n.d.). Multiple users can access the SASS at the same time to help providers complete it efficiently. When another user is working on the form, an on-screen notification will appear showing who is currently editing it. If several users are logged in, CIW Online will stop the same person from opening the same service twice, preventing any risk of information being overwritten or corrupted (CIW, 2026).

Each of our practitioners have been given the opportunity, as necessary, to access the SASS document to ensure we are ready for the upcoming inspection. I believe we are working well to have a positive outcome from the inspection.

Gwen

My name is Gwenllian and I will be focussing on policies in our setting. According to The Hub (2025), policies and procedures help and guide all staff working in the setting. They also state that policies endorse and ensure the well-being of all families, children, staff, volunteers and everyone who is connected to the setting. Additionally, Cambridge University (no date) state that a policy is a set of ideas of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to by a group of people. In our setting, we as a team have agreed on all policies and procedures that are in place.

In our setting, there are many effective policies in place. One of these policies is our safeguarding policy. Safeguarding relates to protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, which would enable them to live free from abuse, harm, and neglect, as suggested by Care Quality Commission (2022). The NSPCC (2024) explains that children have the right to be protected from harm. This links to article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2019), protection from violence, abuse, and neglect. Although this policy is in place and appears effective, there has been some issues that have been raised. An issue that has risen within this policy is the fact that it is not widely shared with all those who are linked to the setting, such as parents and the children. This issue has come to light through parent evenings and parent feedback at handover. They provided feedback which told us that they feel safeguarding is not spoken about enough, therefore their children may also not be spoken to about it. However, as **Danielle** stated, there has been low attendance from parents to these parents' evening meetings, meaning that we have not received enough feedback in relation to our policies.

Although the children are a bit young to understand safeguarding, it is still important that they are aware of their rights and that they are aware that they are able to reach out to us as practitioners. This may be done through the UNCRC (2019), specifically article 3, best interests of the child. Within the setting, we could discuss safeguarding and basic rights to the children at activities such as circle time. Other methods we could do include putting notices on the walls created appropriately for both parents and children to see. However, this may need to be adapted for children with ALN to support them and help them to understand their rights the same as everyone else. **Leah, is this something that you could look into?**

This method of gathering information has its pros and cons. Lester (2019) explains that parent evenings are able to build parent/teacher partnerships. This has allowed for parents to voice their opinions to us about our setting. Although Hamilton (2025) notes that a typical parents evening meeting would last about only five minutes. This is a huge con to using this method to gather feedback from parents as five minutes is not enough time to share any concerns, especially as practitioners would be conscious of the fact that they have another meeting not long after. **Danielle, perhaps an event could be arranged so that parents have significant time to voice their opinion?**

Another policy we have in place is our food and hygiene safety policy. NHS Inform (2025) tells us that good food hygiene refers to knowing how to avoid the spread of bacteria when cooking, storing, and preparing food. Foods that aren't handled, stored, and cooked, correctly can cause food poisoning. Virtual College (2025) states that a level one food hygiene certificate is required for those who indirectly work with food, and those who work directly with food will need a level two certificate. It is vital that each member of staff within our setting has this certificate kept up to date to align with our policy so that we can continue to provide meals to the children. **Kelsey, can you make sure these are arranged?**

An issue that has risen within this policy is that we now have more children in the setting who have severe allergies, as well as the fact that parents feel that their children are not properly educated on the importance of eating healthy and food hygiene. This issue has come to light through a survey which was shared with the parents. However, as brought up by **Danielle**, there has been low feedback from our surveys, meaning that we do not have the feedback from every family. Additionally, we could incorporate more activities and sessions into the curriculum in relation to this. **Brionny, is this something that can be arranged?**

This method of gathering information has its pros and cons. DeFranzo (2026) explains that a pro to using surveys is that they have the flexibility to ask a range of questions. Although, again relating back to what **Danielle** has commented, a con to using surveys is that there are some families whose second language is English, or cannot read it, so they are unable to provide any feedback in our surveys. Going forward, a policy in relation to communication between parents and our setting will need to be revised, which will allow for all families to contribute.

Our policies should be monitored because they reflect best practice in the area they cover, as supported by Taylor (2026). Care Inspectorate Wales (2024), who would be carrying out our inspection, state that they aim to "inform policy, standards and provide independent professional advice to the people developing policy, the public and social care sector." As we continue to develop our policies, the CIW can see for themselves how we have responded to feedback and built on it. Additionally, CIW (2024) state that they safeguard adults and children to make sure that their rights are protected. This falls under everyone and our safeguarding policy as on top of everything, we must ensure that each of us are protected. Thank you.

Kelsey

Good morning. As part of our inspection with Care Inspectorate Wales, I will review our staffing arrangements to ensure we demonstrate high-quality practice in line with our Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS).

Staffing is a key area inspectors evaluate because it directly impacts the quality of care, children's safety, and the learning experiences provided in the setting (Care Inspectorate, 2021).

Our Flying Start setting supports between 12 and 30 children under the age of four, with a team of five staff members. Through the SASS, we regularly evaluate whether our staffing structure, staff development and support systems meet the needs of children and families. Today I will focus on how our setting ensures high-quality provision through appropriate ratios, qualified staff, safe recruitment procedures, ongoing training and strong staff support systems.

Staff Ratios.

Firstly, maintaining correct staff-to-child ratios is essential for ensuring children's safety, wellbeing and development (Ofsted, 2025).

In Wales, regulations require settings to follow legal ratios for children under the age of four. Our setting ensures these ratios are consistently met. With five practitioners supporting between 12 and 30 children, we can provide safe supervision and responsive care. (Welsh Government, 2023).

Maintaining appropriate ratios allows practitioners to give children individual attention, respond quickly to their needs and support learning through play (NSPCC, 2025). It also helps create a calm and well-organised environment where children feel safe and supported.

During our previous inspection, Care Inspectorate Wales recommended increasing staffing levels to further strengthen the quality of care. As a result, the setting reviewed its staffing structure to ensure ratios support both child safety and meaningful interactions between staff and children.

Staff Qualifications and Training.

Another important factor in delivering high-quality childcare is ensuring that staff are appropriately qualified and well trained (Birth to 5 Matters, n.d).

Within our setting, practitioners hold recognised childcare qualifications relevant to working with young children. Staff also complete essential training, including paediatric first aid and

safeguarding training, which ensures they are prepared to respond to emergencies and protect children's wellbeing (Social Care Wales, n.d). This also includes a level 3 or above to work in a flying start setting, which is essential.

In addition to mandatory training, staff participate in continuous professional development, also known as CPD. CPD allows practitioners to regularly update their knowledge and skills so they remain confident and competent in their roles (CIPD, n.d).

Recruitment and Safety Checks.

To ensure children's safety, our setting follows strict recruitment and safeguarding procedures (Gov.uk, 2015). All staff members must do an enhanced DBS check, along with identity verification and professional references, before they begin working in the setting (Gov.uk, 2025).

These checks ensure that everyone working with children is suitable and understands their safeguarding responsibilities. Safeguarding training is also regularly updated to ensure staff can recognise concerns and respond appropriately (High skill training, 2025). These processes demonstrate our commitment to protecting children and meeting safeguarding expectations set out by Care Inspectorate Wales and outlined in our SASS (HM government, 2023).

Staff Supervision, Leadership and Communication.

Practitioners participate in regular supervision meetings and performance reviews where they can

- reflect on their work
- discuss any challenges
- Identify professional development needs (HCPC, n.d).

Effective leadership within the setting also helps support staff development. Leaders provide a clear vision for high-quality childcare, promote open communication and encourage teamwork (Sue Robb, n.d). A whole-setting approach ensures that staff collaborate, share ideas and work together to support children's development (Care Learning, 2025).

As part of reflective practice, staff may also watch training videos, take notes and discuss how these ideas could improve practice within the setting. These discussions allow staff to consider changes that could strengthen the quality of care and learning opportunities provided for

children. One app that I would like to introduce to our flying start setting is Atlas, there are videos of training and courses to complete to further our knowledge.

Staff Wellbeing and Reflective Practice.

Staff wellbeing is another important aspect of providing high-quality childcare (CIPD, 2025). Reflective practice is encouraged through supervision meetings, team discussions and training sessions. Staff regularly evaluate their practice and consider how improvements can be made (Research in Practice, 2025).

Recently, I have been collecting information through questionnaires from staff and parents to evaluate how well the setting supports children and families (Science Direct Journal, 2022). Although the feedback was mostly positive, some issues were highlighted which we are discussing today.

Barriers to Professional Development.

Although training is very important, there can sometimes be barriers to professional development.

For example, training courses can be expensive, some sessions may be too short, or they may not always be relevant to the needs of the setting. In some cases, there may also be a lack of follow-up training to support staff in applying what they have learned (iSpring, 2026). Because of this, our setting aims to choose training opportunities that are practical, relevant and beneficial, ensuring that staff can apply their learning directly within the setting.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, maintaining appropriate staffing ratios, ensuring staff are well qualified and supporting continuous professional development demonstrates our commitment to providing high-quality childcare. By supporting staff wellbeing, encouraging reflective practice and working closely with families, our setting continues to meet the expectations of Care Inspectorate Wales and the standards outlined in our Self-Assessment of Service Statement.

Leah

Hello, my name is Leah, and I will be discussing Additional Learning Needs within our Flying Start setting in preparation for inspection.

I will be focusing on three key issues that are crucial for identifying and supporting children with Additional Learning Needs. These are staff training, multi-agency working, and partnerships

with parents, all of which play a vital role in achieving positive outcomes for children and ensuring that support is consistent and effective across all aspects of their learning and development.

To begin, staff training is a key issue, as practitioners need the knowledge and confidence to identify and support children with Additional Learning Needs at an early stage. According to Welsh Government Flying Start guidance, early identification and intervention for children with ALN is emphasised, along with the need for an appropriately skilled workforce. However, the guidance lacks specific standardised training requirements, which can lead to inconsistent staff knowledge and confidence across different settings. Focused training ensures all staff are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills, improving their ability to support children with ALN effectively and achieve positive outcomes. This investment in training addresses inconsistencies and strengthens our ability to meet inspection standards, as well as ensuring that children receive timely and appropriate support from all practitioners involved.

Building on **Kelsey's** earlier discussion about general staff development, she could help by identifying areas where practitioners feel less confident and suggesting targeted training sessions focused specifically on ALN. Her role in supporting ongoing reflection and coaching helps link wider staff development directly to improving outcomes for children with ALN and ensures that the training has practical impact.

To monitor staff training in our Flying Start setting, we gather feedback through surveys, observations, and direct input from both parents and staff. Training is reinforced through coaching, team meetings, and follow-up sessions, and keeping detailed records of feedback ensures staff are well supported in meeting children's needs. By continually reflecting on training outcomes and reviewing the impact on practice, and with **Kelsey** supporting these reviews, we can maintain high standards and ensure that staff feel confident in supporting all children, particularly those with additional learning needs.

Another important issue is **multi-agency working**, as early intervention often relies on effective collaboration between professionals such as health visitors, therapists, and the EYALNLO. Supporting children with ALN can be challenging when communication between services is not clear or consistent. If information is not shared effectively, children may not get the support they need quickly, and the help they do receive can feel inconsistent across nursery, home, and specialist settings. Families can also be unsure about who to contact or how decisions are made, which can make it harder for them to be fully involved in their child's development. That is why clear communication and teamwork are essential for ensuring a coordinated and joined-up approach.

It is particularly important that a child's Individual Development Plan, or IDP, is kept up to date and shared with all professionals involved. The IDP sets out the child's needs, the support they will receive, and the outcomes expected. It is person-centred, taking into account the views, wishes, and feelings of the child and their family, and helps to ensure support is coordinated and consistent across different settings. From my experience in Flying Start, multi-agency working can be a challenge. According to the Department for Education, differences in understanding roles and coordinating between agencies can create barriers, even when everyone values working together. In our setting, this can make it harder to share information, keep IDPs up to date, and ensure all professionals and families are working towards the same goals. When partnerships are not fully joined up, support can become inconsistent, and children do not always get the best possible outcomes, which emphasises the importance of improving communication and collaboration across all services.

Partnerships with parents are also essential, as families provide valuable insight into their child's needs and help ensure a consistent approach both at home and in the setting. In our Flying Start, we work closely with parents and carers to make sure they are involved in planning and supporting their child's development. Staff introduce families to the programme, provide guidance and information, and help them understand the support available. When parents feel included and listened to, they are more likely to engage in planning and decisions for their child. However, communication and support can sometimes be inconsistent, showing that while strong partnerships are essential, they can also be a challenge in practice.

Supporting children with ALN relies heavily on teamwork between Flying Start staff, health visitors, and other specialist professionals. In accordance with NHS England guidance, effective partnerships are about listening, sharing information, and working together to meet children's needs. In practice, when communication is not clear or information is not shared consistently, gaps in support can occur, approaches can become inconsistent, and families may feel unsure about decisions. Making sure everyone works together and keeps families involved is essential, but it is also one of the harder parts of supporting children with ALN effectively, and it requires continuous reflection and effort from all professionals involved.

When we think about supporting children with ALN in Flying Start, tackling challenges around staff training, multi-agency working, and partnerships is essential. Making sure staff feel confident, that professionals communicate clearly, and that families are fully involved ties directly to the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, the ALN Code for Wales 2021, and NHS guidance on partnership working.

By putting these frameworks into practice, and making changes like focused staff training, better multi-agency communication, and stronger family engagement, we can provide children with consistent, timely, and high-quality support. These improvements not only protect children's rights and make transitions smoother but also help improve outcomes for children with ALN across our Flying Start programme.

Close Meeting

Finally, preparation for inspection requires meaningful and ongoing improvement, not just compliance. Our Flying Start provision becomes more inclusive, reflective, and responsive by improving parental engagement, communication, and decision-making. These changes meet legal, National Minimum Standards, and CIW standards and improve child and family outcomes.

A strong focus on supporting children with ALN provides early identification, focused intervention, and inclusive practise, helping all children attain their potential. Staff professional development boosts confidence, consistency, and best practise implementation while creating a reflective and collaborative team culture. Policies are reviewed and updated to stay current, effective, and integrated into daily life. A responsive, child-centred curriculum encourages holistic development, equity, and the different needs and interests of our children and families.

These methods show a dedication to achieving inspection standards and enhancing quality, inclusivity, and impact.

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